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THE KING'S CLASSICS UNDER
THE GENERAL EDITORSHIP OF
PROFESSOR GOLLANCZ



B.M.M.

THE EARLY LIVES
OF DANTE



THE EARLY LIVES
OF DANTE TRANS-
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WICKSTEED M.A.

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PREFACE

THE greater part of Boccaccio's *Life of Dante*, together with the whole of Bruni's, was translated by me in 1898, and was issued to my pupils, though not formally published. The work was hastily executed and contained many errors. In 1901, Mr. James Robinson Smith issued an admirable translation of both the lives, in the series of "*Yale Studies in English*." He was good enough to acknowledge indebtedness to my work, "for the rendering of certain words and phrases."

In completing and revising my translation for the present edition I have throughout consulted his work and by its aid have detected some mistakes in my own. Many more he would have enabled me to discover had I not already been fortunate enough to find them out for myself. I must also, in my turn, reciprocate the acknowledgment of indebtedness for "the rendering of certain words and phrases," especially in the new matter of this edition; but in the great majority of cases coincidences of expression, on whichever side the

priority lies, must be regarded as having risen independently.

Our principles of translation differ considerably. Mr. Smith's happy selection of words and his practice of breaking up the sentences of the original, have given a lucidity and precision to his work, which must excite the admiration of his rivals and the gratitude of his readers.

But for myself, whatever lesser measure of success I might have been able to attain on the same lines, I had already deliberately sacrificed to an attempt (how successful I can hardly judge) to retain something of the very special flavour of Boccaccio's style, with its quaint harmonious meanderings, flowing, in long and intricate windings through dependent clauses and participial and parenthetical constructions, to the uniting periods which we reach at last (if they come at all), with a half surprised amusement at the long delayed gathering of the waters into a single channel. The task of the reader is certainly not lightened by this method, nor is sharpness of impression furthered by it. But, I would fain hope that some compensating pleasure, some sense of far away harmonies, together with some closer feeling of companionship with the writer, may in some cases be gained.

INTRODUCTION

Versions of "The Life."—Boccaccio's Life of Dante exists in two versions (to say nothing of intermediate forms), the longer of which is usually spoken of as the 'Life' and the shorter as the 'Compendium.' Concerning the relations of these two versions there has been much discussion, as also concerning the historical credibility of either form, and whether both are from Boccaccio's own hand or only one; and in the latter case which of the two is authentic. In selecting the fuller form of the Life for presentation I have followed the prevailing practice, with full conviction that it is justified from every possible point of view. An adequate discussion of all these points will be found by the English reader in Dr. Witte's "Essays,"¹ and in Dr. Moore's "Dante and his early Biographers."² A still fuller treatment will be found by readers of Italian in Macrì-Leone (*Vita di Dante*, Firenze, 1888) and Rostagno (*Testo del così detto Compendio*, et cet., Bologna, 1899).

¹ Essays on Dante (Duckworth, 1898), pp. 222, sqq., and 262-293.

² Nutt, 1890.

Date and Documentary Value.—Nothing can be safely alleged as to the date of the composition of the *Life* except that it was subsequent to the compilation of Boccaccio's manuscript, now in the Medicæo-Laurentian Library¹ in Florence (which is supposed to have been completed somewhere about 1348), and considerably before his appointment as lecturer on Dante in 1373. Its trustworthiness has been much discussed; but scholars appear to be settling down to the conclusion that whereas Boccaccio was somewhat careless both as reader and writer,² and delighted in imaginative elaboration and heightening of descriptions, he is nevertheless to be taken as a serious biographer, who had made careful investigations, and who used the material he had gathered with some degree of critical judgment. On the other hand it seems clear that he states conclusions at which he has

¹ No. XXIX, 8.

² Thus, he gives Urban IV as the reigning pope at the time of Dante's birth, instead of Clement IV; and Alberto, instead of Bartolommeo della Scala as Lord of Verona at the time of Dante's exile. His account of the Guelph and Ghibelline disputes, and of the political events in which Dante was so closely concerned is vague and inadequate in the extreme; and he was capable (in another work), of representing Dante's Geryon (*INF.*, XVII) as swimming about in the waters of Cocytus and so concealing his monstrous form (*De Genealogia Deorum*, I, 21).

derived by inference, with as much confidence as if he had definite and direct evidence for them. Thus while we may be pretty certain that he had some reason for every statement that he makes, it does not follow that the reason was always a good one, and whenever we can get behind it to the grounds on which it rests, we are at liberty to reconsider the matter and to form our own judgment.

Boccaccio's Methods of Work.—Sometimes the material on which he is working may be found in the manuscript already referred to; sometimes we may reasonably suppose that his statements rest on inferences drawn from expressions used by Dante himself; but sometimes we are without any clue to the grounds on which he makes his assertions; and in these cases we can go no further than to say that a writer with good means of information, endowed with good will and with fair judgment, though by no means scrupulously accurate, had what he regarded as adequate ground for believing these things to be facts.

We may give a few examples of these three classes:—

When Boccaccio states that Dante began his poem in Latin, and according to some authorities, intended to dedicate its three *Cantiche* to Uguccone della Aggiola, Frederick of Sicily, and Moroello Malespina,

respectively, we know that he based his statements on a document which he had seen and had copied, which he regarded as a respectable but not a conclusive authority, and which we still possess. It is interesting to note, moreover, that in this instance modern criticism can hardly be regarded as having advanced beyond this doubtful verdict on the authority of the 'letter of *Fra Ilario*' (see below). 2. On the other hand when Boccaccio declares that Dante, in his after life, was ashamed of the *Vita Nuova*, we may fairly suppose that the statement is due to a careless reading of the first book of the *Convivio*, in which Dante (perhaps a trifle nervously) declares that he is *not* ashamed of the *Vita Nuova*, but shows great concern as to the "infamy" which the common understanding of certain of his *Canzoni* is calculated to bring upon him. Again Boccaccio's assertion that the *Comedy* was begun in 1300, no doubt rests on his interpretation of its opening lines, and adds nothing to our information ; nor is it possible to say whether his statements as to the dates of the remaining works rest on any other basis than that of obvious conjectures suggested by the works themselves. 3. The assertions as to Dante's extreme political importance in Florence bear evidence of some rhetorical inflation, but are evidently not mere inventions. They

rest upon evidence, the details of which we have no adequate means of controlling.

His Allegations against Dante.—To which of these two last classes does Boccaccio's startling declaration as to Dante's personal licentiousness of life belong? Had he independent evidence of it, or did he only infer it from the study of Dante's own works? There is no conclusive answer to this question, but my own belief is strong, that Boccaccio based his statement on internal evidence supplied by Dante's works. Filippo Villani expressly, and Lionardo Bruni by implication, contradict Boccaccio's opinion, and though they themselves perhaps stood on no firmer ground than that of inference and general impression, yet their testimony is enough to show that at any rate there was no consistent tradition and therefore, presumably, no body of external evidence, to Dante's discredit in this matter. How the internal evidence of Dante's works became the nucleus of a *chronique scandaleuse*, amongst such as had a taste for the like, may be seen by the version of Dante's amours, given in the shorter form, or Compendium, of Boccaccio's Life, to which reference has already been made. The epitomiser, after speaking of the death of Beatrice, continues: "Nor was our poet impassioned by this love alone; nay, rather was he

much disposed to this affection. We find him often to have sighed for other objects, in his riper age; and especially after his exile, when he was in Lucca, for a lady whom he calls Pargoletta, and besides this, almost at the end of his life, in the Alps of the Casentino, for an Alpine lady who, if I have not been misinformed, however beautiful in face had a goitre. And for one or another of these, he composed many a fine thing in rhyme." It is easy to see how this trash has grown up on the one hand out of a mis-conception of the tender tribute rendered by Dante in the *Purgatorio*, to the unknown Lucchese lady, Gentucca; together with a phrase in his confession in the Earthly Paradise; and on the other hand out of the evidence supplied by the celebrated 'Mountain Song.'¹ And again Pietro Alighieri, in more than one curious note on the *Comedy*, has shewn the lengths, in this and in other matters, to which the allegorising interpretation might go in its attempt to extract biographical material from the details of the *Comedy*.

In a word there is abundant material in Dante's

¹ Could we accept (which I for one cannot) the theory recently revived by Rostagno that the 'Compendium' is in truth from Boccaccio's own hand, being a first draft of the 'Life,' we should be able to say with absolute confidence that Boccaccio had nothing to go on but his own inferences from Dante's poems.

lyrics, in his correspondence in prose and verse, and in the *Comedy*, upon his own interpretation of which Boccaccio may have based his statement; and on the whole I think the student may safely form his own judgment from the material in his hands, without attaching any authoritative significance whatever to Boccaccio's assertion. It is safe even to go a step further and to say that the dominating impression which that assertion leaves is definitely false; for whatever may have been that past over which, in the *Purgatorio* and elsewhere, Dante wept so bitterly, the smokeless flame of the *Paradiso* cannot have risen from an altar on which incense was offered to any strange gods. Now there can be no manner of doubt that Dante himself would have regarded such a life as Boccaccio says he lived, as a life of grave sin; and the *Paradiso* is not the record of spiritual raptures alternating with seasons of faithlessness, but reveals the tranquil intensity of a life that has not only come to itself, but has gained the security of an assured conquest.

Some needful Warnings.—One further caution is necessary. Readers must not only exercise their judgment on what Boccaccio says, but must be careful not to attribute to him things he never said at all. Writers on Dante have not always observed this caution. For

example, with reference to the intensity of Dante's party feelings (a subject on which Boccaccio is always ill-informed and superficial), there is a celebrated passage in which Boccaccio declares that every woman and child in Romagna knew that if they had spoken disparagingly of the Ghibelline cause, Dante in his rage would have flung stones at them. It is merely Boccaccio's way of saying that Dante's feelings were very violent. So when Boswell questioned Johnson as to the work of one Francis Osborne, he answered "A conceited fellow. Were a man to write so now the boys would throw stones at him." I suppose that if Mr. Francis Osborne had reached as great posthumous fame as Dante did, we should by now read in a hundred biographical sketches, "Shortly after the publication of his works there was so violent a reaction against his style of composition that he could not safely proceed from his house without an escort; since bands of boys and young men awaited him at every corner to pelt him with stones." At any rate a like process has, in Dante's case, effected this conversion of the raw material of vigorous rhetoric into the manufactured article of biography.

In a far more celebrated passage Boccaccio expresses his views on marriage. The history of the tirade as

well as the tirade itself is highly entertaining. Aristotle's successor in his school at Athens, Theophrastus, appears to have been a foe of matrimony. At any rate he wrote amusingly, in a work now lost, on the sorrows of married life. Between six and seven centuries later, while this work was still extant, the learned and witty Jerome was engaged upon a polemical treatise against one Jovinian, who, amongst other bad things, advocated the marriage of the clergy! Jerome availed himself of the wit of Theophrastus and translated the racy passage on the woes of marriage. More than nine centuries later Boccaccio in his turn found the passage in Jerome, and was so delighted with it that he wrote it out in a manuscript book (already mentioned more than once) which contained a number of odds and ends, some of which related to Dante. When, in writing his "Life of Dante," he came to his marriage, he could not refrain from giving his views of marriage in general, and dragging the whole of the satire, neck and crop, into his composition, extending and embellishing it till it became one of the most delicious and exuberant bits of satire in any language. It had indeed nothing in the world to do with Dante, as Boccaccio is careful to state; but he took occasion to remark sarcastically that whatever the poet's matrimonial experiences may have

been, it is certain that when, by his banishment, he was once rid of Gemma, he never went where she was or had her come where he was. This one piece of negative information, coming at the end of the tirade against marriage, has (against Boccaccio's express warning) served to establish a consistent tradition, only recently challenged, that Dante and Gemma were miserably ill-mated. What was Boccaccio's source of information as to Dante and Gemma never having met after the former's exile it is impossible to say, but he himself treats the fact as capable of other interpretations than that based on supposed disagreements; and, when, in a more serious part of the biography, he makes a passing allusion to Dante's feelings about his wife and children, and Gemma's management of his affairs, when he was banished, a quite different colour is given to the matter. Moreover we know from the early commentators (not to mention a reference by Dante's friend, Del Virgilio, the relevance of which has been questioned, though I think without sufficient grounds) that there was at any rate no notorious breach between Dante and his wife.

It would be straining evidence to say that we can establish a positive case on the other side.

Bruni.—Of the rest of the material in this volume

little need be said. Lionardo Bruni Aretino (1369-1444) was an accredited historian and man of letters. His "Life of Dante," indeed, contains one astonishing statement, the more astonishing as coming from a historian of Florence, namely, that Dante was born in 1265, *soon after the return of the Guelf party from exile*; whereas it is notorious that the return did not take place till after the Battle of Benevento in 1266. But the tendency of all recent investigations is to confirm rather than to impeach the trustworthiness of Lionardo's data, in spite of this blunder. We may take it that Lionardo was a serious and competent biographer who had access to good sources of information, and who made good use of them.

The Villanis.—The passage from Giovanni Villani given in the Appendices is our earliest account of Dante. Here as elsewhere the Florentine chronicler is vivid and precise, rather than accurate, in respect to matters that did not come within his immediate knowledge. Thus he gives the wrong month for Dante's death. But in their main purport his statements cannot be impeached, and they are invaluable as the record of the impression Dante produced on a contemporary, and as placing the authenticity of some of his letters beyond dispute. It is regrettable that

the absence of an authoritative text of Villani renders the extent of this earliest canon of Dante's works somewhat uncertain.

Filippo Villani, Giovanni's nephew, was appointed public lecturer on Dante in 1404. He is the earliest writer who cites the *Epistle to Can Grande* expressly as a work of Dante's; and amongst other compositions he compiled a series of lives of celebrated Florentines, amongst whom was Dante. The *Life* is written in Latin, and contains little or nothing worthy of note that is not to be found in Boccaccio or Lionardo, with the single exception of the passage translated amongst the *Appendices*. As to its value, the reader may form his own judgment, as the source from which it is derived is entirely unknown.

A Supposed Contemporary Document.— Finally, I have added what professes to be a letter of a contemporary, describing a remarkable interview with Dante. If we could rely upon its authenticity it would be a document of the very highest importance. The original exists in Boccaccio's manuscript, so often alluded to, and the reader will observe that Boccaccio himself had sufficient confidence in it to use the material it contains freely, though he did not regard its authority as conclusive on the question of the

dedication of the three *Cantiche*. The current of recent critical opinion has run strongly, even scornfully, against the authenticity of this document, but most of the hypotheses that have been put forward concerning it are shattered by the now admitted fact that the manuscript in which it is preserved was written by Boccaccio himself, and that he relies upon it for some of his statements in the *Life*. The whole question must be regarded as open, but the reader should be emphatically warned that he must not assume the authenticity of the document.

The Present Text.—As to the texts, in Boccaccio's *Life* I have followed the Macrì-Leone edition; never departing from its words, even so far as to make the obvious substitution of Baalim for Balaam in the account of Solomon's idolatry; but from time to time altering the punctuation.

Lionardo's *Life* was originally translated from an inferior reprint, but has now been compared with the authoritative edition by Galletti.

ERRATA

- P. 65 second line from below for *months* read *mouths*.
P. 66 line 1, for *reason* read *season*.
P. 127 lines 3 and 4 from below, for *made a great camp*, read *gathered a great force*.

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BOCCACCIO'S ENCOMIUM
ON DANTE OR "TRATTATEL-
LO IN LAUDE DI DANTE"
COMMONLY KNOWN AS
THE LIFE OF DANTE

SOLON, whose bosom was reputed a human temple
Of divine wisdom, and whose most sacred laws still
stand as an illustrious witness of ancient justice to the
men of to-day, was often wont to say (as some affirm)
that every Commonwealth must go or stand upon
two feet, like as do we ourselves ; of which, with ripe
sagacity, he declared the right foot to be the allowing
of no fault that had been committed to go unpunished,
and the left the rewarding of every good deed ; whereto
he added that if either of the two feet were withdrawn
by vice or negligence, or were less than well preserved,
without doubt that Commonwealth which so fared
must needs go halt ; and if by ill chance it should be
faulty in both the two, we must hold it as most certain
that it would have no power to stand up in any
fashion. Moved then by this so praiseworthy and
so clearly true opinion, many excellent and ancient
peoples did honour to men of worth, sometimes by
deifying them, sometimes by a marble statue, often by
illustrious obsequies, and sometimes by a triumphal
arch, or again by a laurel crown, according to the
deserts that had preceded. The punishments, on the

other hand, inflicted on the guilty I care not to rehearse. Furthered by which honours and purgings, Assyria, Macedonia, Greece, and lastly the Roman Commonwealth, reached the ends of the earth with their achievements, and the stars with their fame. But the footprints which they left in so lofty examples have not only been ill followed by their successors of the present day, and most of all by my own Florentines, but have been so far departed from that ambition has got hold of every reward that belongs to virtue. Wherefore I, and whosoever else will look upon all this with the eye of reason, may perceive, not without extremest anguish of mind, evil and perverse men exalted to high places and to the supreme offices and rewards, and the good exiled, crushed and humiliated. To the which things what end the judgment of God may have in store let them consider who turn the helm of this ship; for we, the humbler throng, are tossed indeed on the stormy tide, but have no share in the offence. And although what I have said above might be made good by countless instances of ingratitude or of dissolute pardon, patent to all, yet (the less to expose our faults, and also to come at my main purpose) it shall suffice me to have recounted a single one. Nor shall this one be little or of small account,

for I am to record the exile of that most illustrious man, Dante Alighieri. And how much good this ancient citizen, born of no obscure parents, had deserved by his virtue, by his knowledge and by his good deeds, is shewn and shall be shewn sufficiently by the things that we see he wrought; the which, had they been done in a just city, without doubt should have prepared for him the most distinguished rewards.

Oh thought of infamy, oh shameful deed, oh miserable example, open proof of ruin to come! Instead of these rewards were meted out to him unjust and rabid condemnation, perpetual exile, alienation of his paternal goods, and, had it been possible, the tainting of his most glorious name by false accusations. Which things, in some part, the fresh footprints of his flight, his bones buried in an alien city and his children scattered in alien homes, still clearly shew to us. If all the other wrongs Florence hath wrought could be hidden from the all-seeing eyes of God, would not this one suffice to call down his wrath upon her? Yea, verily! But who hath counterwise been exalted, I hold it seemly to leave in silence. So that, if we look aright, not only hath the present world departed from the path of the former, whereof I spoke but now, but it hath utterly turned its feet the other

way. Wherefore it is manifest enough that if, counter to the above mentioned opinion of Solon, we and the rest who live in like manner stand on our feet without falling, the cause can be no other save that by long wont the very nature of things hath been changed, as we see many times come to pass; or it is a special miracle, whereby God for some merit in our past sustains us, against all human counsel; or it is his patience, which perchance awaits our repentance, if the which do not follow at the last let no man doubt but that his wrath, which advances with slow step to its vengeance, holds in store for us torment so much the heavier as to make full amends for its delay. But since, however much ill deeds appear to go unpunished, we ought not only to flee from them, but also by well-doing to strive to make amends for them, therefore, recognising that I myself am a part, though but a small one, of that same city whereof Dante Alighieri, considering his deserts, his nobility and his virtue, was a very great one, and therefore, like every other citizen, I too share the general debt to his honour, albeit I am insufficient for so great a task, yet what the city herself ought to have done towards him with magnificence, but hath not done, that according to my slender faculty will I myself attempt to do; not

with statue or illustrious obsequies, whereof the use no longer holds amongst us, and whereto my powers stretch not ; but with letters, though poor for so great emprise. Hereof I have, and hereof I will give ; lest foreign peoples should have power to say that his fatherland had been alike unthankful to so great a poet, whether taken generally or man by man. And I shall write (in style full humble and light, because my wit provides me not with aught of more exalted, and in our Florentine idiom, that it may not depart from what he used in the greater part of his works) those things as to which he kept seemly silence concerning himself, to wit the nobleness of his origin, his life, his studies and his character ; and thereafter will I gather together the works he composed ; wherein he hath rendered himself so illustrious amongst those to come that perchance my letters will serve no less to darken than to brighten him, albeit this is not my purpose nor my will ; content always, in this and in every other thing, to be set right by any wiser than myself wherever I have spoke amiss. But that occasion thereto may not arise, I humbly pray that he who drew that other to his vision, by a stair so lofty as we know, do give his present aid and guidance to my wit and to my weak hand.

FLORENCE, noblest amongst all the cities of Italy, had her beginning, according as the ancient histories and the general opinion of to-day would seem to indicate, from the Romans ; and in process of time she so grew, and was so filled with people and with men of note, that she began to be regarded by all around not only as a city but as a power. But, uncertain though it be wherein the cause lay of the change that came upon so lofty a beginning—whether it were in the contrariety of fortune, or in the unpropitious heavens, or in the deserts of the citizens—most certain it is that, not after many centuries, Attila, that most cruel king of the Vandals and general devastator of almost all Italy, having first slain or scattered all or the greater part of those citizens who by nobility of blood or by some other condition were of any fame, reduced the city to ashes and ruins ; in which state she is thought to have remained for more than three hundred years. After which term, the Roman Empire having been transferred, not without cause, from Greece to Gaul, Charles the Great, then the most clement sovereign of the French, was raised to the imperial exaltation ; and

after enduring many toils, moved, I take it, by the divine spirit, he turned his imperial mind to the rebuilding of the desolated city; and although he reduced it within a narrow circuit of walls, yet he caused it to be rebuilt by those same who had been its first founders, as far as might be after the likeness of Rome; gathering within it, none the less, whatsoever feeble remnant might be found of the descendants of the ancient exiles.

But amongst the other new inhabitants (perhaps as regulator of the rebuilding, assigner of the houses and streets, and giver of needful laws to the new people), there came from Rome, as fame declares, a most noble member of the house of the Frangipani, in the prime of life, whom everyone called Eliseo. And it chanced that when he had accomplished the main purpose for which he had come, drawn by love of the city newly regulated by himself, or by the pleasantness of the site, to which perhaps he saw that heaven must needs be propitious in the future, or by whatsoever cause it may have been, he became a permanent citizen therein, and left behind him a family of children and of descendants neither small nor unworthy of praise; the which, abandoning the ancient surname of their ancestors, took, as their patronymic, the name of him who had

given them their beginnings in that place, and all called themselves the Elisei. Of whom, as age succeeded age and one descended from another, there was born and lived, amongst others, a cavalier, valiant and conspicuous in arms and in wit, whose name was Cacciaguida; to whom in his youth was given by his parents, as his bride, a damsel sprung from the Aldighieri of Ferrara, esteemed no less for her beauty and her character than for the nobility of her blood; with whom he lived certain years, and begat certain children with her. And whatever the others may have been called, it pleased her, as women often love to do, to recall in one of them the name of her own forebears, and she called him Aldighieri, although the name survived, in a form corrupted by dropping this letter 'd,' as Alighieri. This man's worth was the cause of his descendants dropping the title degli Elisei, and taking the cognomen degli Alighieri, which still remains to this day. And whereas there descended from him certain children, and grandchildren, and grandchildren's children, it came to pass that in the reign of the Emperor Frederick II. one of them was born whose name was Alighieri, and who was destined to become illustrious rather by the son he was to have than by himself; whose wife when pregnant, and not far

removed from the time when she should be delivered, saw in a dream of what wondrous kind the fruit of her womb should be ; albeit it was not then understood of her nor of any other, though now, because of the event that has come to pass, it is most manifest to all.

The gentle lady thought in her dream that she was under a most lofty laurel tree, on a green meadow, by the side of a most clear spring, and there she felt herself delivered of a son, who in shortest space, feeding only on the berries which fell from the laurel tree, and the waters of the clear spring, her thought grew up into a shepherd, and strove with all his power to have of the leaves of that tree whose fruit had nourished him ; and as he struggled thereto, her thought she saw him fall, and when he rose again, she saw he was no longer a man, but had become a peacock. At the which thing, so great amazement laid hold of her that her sleep broke ; and in no long space the due time came for her labour, and she was delivered of a son, whom by common consent with his father, they called by name Dante [the Giver] ; and rightly so, because, as will be seen in the sequel, the issue was most perfectly consonant with this name. This was that Dante of whom is the present discourse. This was that Dante granted

by the special grace of God to our age. This was that Dante who was first to open the way for the return of the Muses, banished from Italy. 'Twas he that revealed the glory of the Florentine idiom. 'Twas he that brought under the rule of due numbers every beauty of the vernacular speech. 'Twas he who may be truly said to have brought back dead poesy to life. The which things, when duly considered, will shew that he could not rightly have borne any other name but Dante.

This singular glory of Italy was born in our city, when the Roman Empiry was vacant by the death of Frederick, above named, in the twelve hundred and sixty-fifth year of the saving Incarnation of the King of the universe ; Pope Urban the fourth sitting in the chair of S. Peter. He was received into a paternal house of full smiling fortune, smiling, I mean, according to the quality of the world then current. But I will leave aside all mention of his infancy (whatever matter it may afford), in the which many signs of the glory of his genius appeared, and will say that from the beginning of his boyhood, when he had already learned the first elements of letters, he gave himself not after the fashion of the nobles of to-day to childish wantonness and ease, lounging in his

mother's lap, but gave up his whole boyhood, in his own city, to unbroken study of the liberal arts, and became wondrous expert therein. And as his mind and genius ripened with his years, he disposed himself not to those studies that bring gain, whereto everyone in general now hastens, but with laudable desire for perpetual fame, scorning those riches that are but for a season, he freely gave himself to the desire of having full knowledge of the fictions of the poets, and the exposition thereof by the rules of art. In which exercise he became the closest intimate of Virgil, of Horace, of Ovid, of Statius, and of every other famous poet, not only loving to know them, but also in lofty verse striving to imitate them; even as his works, whereof we shall discourse hereafter in their time, make manifest. And perceiving that the works of the poets are not vain and silly fables or marvels, as many witless ones suppose, but have concealed within them the sweetest fruits of historical or philosophical truth, so that the full conceptions of the poets may not be wholly had without history and moral and natural philosophy, thereupon duly dividing out his time, he strove to master History by himself, and Philosophy under divers teachers, not without long study and toil. And enamoured by the sweetness of knowing

the truth of the things locked up by heaven, and finding no other in this life more dear, wholly abandoning all other temporal anxiety, he gave himself up entirely to this alone; and in order that no part of philosophy should be left unscrutinised by him, he plunged with keen intellect into the profoundest depths of theology. Nor was the result remote from the intention; for thinking nought of heat or cold, of vigils or of fasts, nor any other bodily vexation, he reached by unbroken study to such knowledge of the Divine Essence and the other Sejunct Intelligences as may be compassed here by human intellect. And as it was at divers ages that he studied and learned the divers sciences, so likewise it was at divers Places of Study that he mastered them under divers teachers.

The first elements, as above set forth, he got in his own native city; and thence, as to a place richer in such food, he repaired to Bologna; and when already verging towards age he went to Paris, where more than once, in disputations, he gave proof of the loftiness of his genius, with such glory to himself, that, when the tale is told, even yet do they that hear it marvel. And by studies such and so many he not unrightly earned the loftiest of titles, wherefore, the whilst he lived, some ever called him Poet, some Philosopher,

and many Theologian. But because the victory is more glorious in proportion as the might of the conquered enemy was the greater, I deem it meet to set forth out of how surging and tempestuous a sea, tossed now this way and now that, victorious alike over the waves and the adverse winds, he won the wholesome port of those most illustrious titles afore-named.

STUDIES, and especially those of speculation, to which our Dante, as already shewn, entirely surrendered himself, are wont to demand solitude and removal of anxiety, and tranquillity of mind. In the stead of which removal and quiet, almost from the beginning of his life up to the day of his death Dante experienced the most fierce and unbearable passion of love ; wife ; family and civic cares ; exile, and poverty ; (to say naught of other more special cares which these of necessity bring in their train) ; all which, that their weight may the more fully appear, I judge it meet to unfold severally.

In that season wherein the sweetness of heaven reclothes the earth with its adornments, making her all to smile with diversity of flowers mingled amongst green leaves, it was the custom both of men and women in our city, each in his district, to hold festival, gathering together in their several companies ; wherefore it chanced that Folco Portinari, amongst the rest, a man in those days much honoured of the citizens, had gathered his neighbours round about, to feast them in

his house on the first day of May. Now amongst them was that Alighieri already spoken of ; and thither (even as little lads are wont to go about with their fathers, especially to places of festivity) Dante, whose ninth year was not yet ended, had accompanied him. And here, mingling with the others of his age—for in the festal house were many of them, boys and girls,—the first tables being served, he abandoned himself with the rest to children's sports, so far as the compass of his small years would extend. There was amongst the throng of young ones a little daughter of the aforesaid Folco, whose name was Bice (though he himself always called her by the original of the name, to wit, Beatrice), whose age was some eight years ; right gracious after her childish fashion, and full gentle and winning in her ways, and of manners and speech far more sedate and modest than her small age required ; and besides this the features of her face full delicate, most excellently disposed, and replete not only with beauty but with such purity and winsomeness, that she was held of many to be a kind of little angel. She then, such as I am painting her, or may be far more beautiful yet, appeared before the eyes of our Dante, at this festival, not I suppose for the first time, but for the first time with power to enamour him ; and he, child

as he still was, received her fair visage into his heart with such affection, that, from that day forth, never, so long as he lived, was he severed therefrom. What hour this may have been none knoweth ; but (whether it were uniformity of disposition or of character, or special influence of the heavens that worked thereto, or that which we know by experience to take place in festivals, where the sweetness of the music, and the general exhilaration, and the delicacy of the viands and the wines, make the minds even of mature men, as well as youths, expand and grow ready to be lightly caught by anything that pleases) certain at least it is that this thing came verily to pass, to wit that Dante in his childish years became the most fervent servitor of Love. But leaving aside all discourse of his boyish experiences I say that the amorous flames multiplied with his age, in such measure that nought else would give him pleasure nor repose nor comfort save beholding her. Wherefore leaving all other affairs, he would go with the utmost solicitude wherever he might expect to see her, as though he must gain from her face and from her eyes all his weal and his entire consolation.

Oh senseless judgment of lovers ! Who else but they would think to reduce the flames by piling on the fuel ? How many and how bitter were the

thoughts, the sighs, the tears, and the other most grievous affections which afterwards, as life advanced, were endured by him by reason of this love, he hath himself in part set forth in his *Vita Nuova*; wherefore I am not careful to recount them more at length. This much alone I would not pass over without note, to wit, that according as he writes, and according as others to whom his desire was known declare, this was a most chaste love, nor did there ever appear either in look or word or sign, any wanton appetite either in the lover or in the thing he loved. No small marvel to the present world, from which all chaste delight has so fled away, and such use hath grown of having the thing that pleases ready to comply with wantonness or ever the mind is well made up to love it, that he who should love in other fashion, being a thing so rare, hath come to be a miracle. If such love could for so long season trouble his food, his sleep, and all other manner of repose, what an adversary must we not suppose it to have been to his sacred studies and his genius. Verily no slight one! Yet are there many who would make it to have been the stimulator to this very thing; arguing from what he wrote so beautifully, in the Florentine idiom and in rhyme, in praise of the lady of his love, to express his ardours and his amorous

conceits. But in truth I allow not this, unless I would affirm that ornate discourse is the supreme part of every science, which is not true.

As everyone may plainly see there is nought enduring in this world; and if there be a thing lightly affected with change, that thing is our human life. A little too much heat or cold in our composition (to say nought of the infinity of other accidents that may chance) may readily lead us from being to not being; nor is gentleness, nor wealth, nor youth, nor any other worldly dignity, privileged thereagainst; and of this universal law Dante must learn the weight by another's death sooner than by his own. The most fair Beatrice was well nigh at the end of her twenty-fourth year, when, as pleased Him who hath all power, she left the anguish of this world and went her way to that glory which her deserts had prepared for her. At which departure Dante was left in such grief, such affliction, such tears, that many of those nearest him, whether relatives or friends, looked for them to have no other end but only death; and this they thought must briefly come, seeing that he would give ear to no comfort nor consolation that was offered him. The days were like the nights, and the nights were like the days; and not an hour of them passed without

wailings and sighs and great quantity of tears ; and his eyes were like two most copious fountains of welling water, in so much that the most part of men marvelled whence he should have so much moisture as might suffice for his weeping. But, even as we see that sufferings become easy to bear by long use, and likewise that all things are reduced and perish in process of time, it came about that after certain months Dante seemed able, without tears, to remember that Beatrice was dead ; and with sounder judgment, as grief gave place somewhat to reason, to apprehend that neither weeping nor sighing, no, nor aught else, could render back his lost lady to him ; wherefore, with more patience, he set himself to endure having lost her presence ; nor did long space go by after he had abandoned his tears, ere his sighs, too, which were already nigh to their close, began in great part to go their way without return.

Now, by reason of his weeping, and by reason of the affliction of his heart within him, and by reason of his taking no heed to himself, he had become in outward guise almost a savage thing to look upon ; gaunt and unshaven, and almost utterly transformed from that which afore he was wont to be ; in so much that his aspect must of force move compassion not

only in his friends, but in every other who beheld it ; albeit he suffered himself to be seen but little, whilst this so tearful life endured, of any save his friends. This compassion, together with fear of yet worse to come, put his relatives to devices for his comfort ; and so, when they saw that his tears were somewhat eased, and were aware that his hot sighs were giving some little respite to his travailed bosom, they began once again to ply the forlorn one with the consolations that had so long been lost on him ; and he, though up to that hour he had obstinately closed his ears against them all, now began not only to open them somewhat, but to listen gladly to whatso might be said with respect to his comforting. Which thing his relatives perceiving, in hope not only to draw him altogether out of his sorrows, but even to bring him into gladness, took counsel together to purpose giving him a wife ; in order that like as his lost lady had been the cause of his sadness so might the newly gained one be of gladness. And, having found a damsel who was meet for his condition, with such discourse as they deemed most suasive, they opened their intent to him. And, not to touch on each point in particular, after long conflict, and not without the lapse of a long space of time between, their discourses brought the effect to pass, and he was married.

Oh, ye blind souls, oh, ye clouded intellects, oh, ye vain purposes of so many mortals, how counter to your intentions in full many a thing are the results that follow;—and for the most part not without reason! What man would take another who felt excessive heat in the sweet air of Italy to the burning sands of Lybia to cool himself, or from the Isle of Cyprus to the eternal shades of the Rhodopæan mountains to find warmth? What physician would set about expelling acute fever by means of fire, or a chill in the marrow of the bones with ice or with snow? Of a surety not one; unless it be he whò shall think to mitigate the tribulations of love by giving one a bride. They who look to accomplish this thing know not the nature of love, nor how it maketh every other passion feed its own. In vain are succours or counsels brought up against its might, if it have taken firm root in the heart of him who long hath loved. Even as in the beginning every feeblest resistance is of avail, so when it hath gathered head even the stoutest are wont many times to turn to hurt. But returning to our matter, and conceding for the moment that there may (so far as that goes,) be things which have power to make men forget the pains of love, what hath he done, who, to draw me out of one grievous thought hath plunged

me into a thousand greater and more grievous? Verily nought else, save by addition of that ill which he hath wrought me, to bring me into a longing for return into that from which he hath drawn me. And this we see come to pass to the most of those who in their blindness marry that they may escape from sorrows, or are induced to marry by others who would draw them hence; nor do they perceive that they have issued out oft one tangle into a thousand, until the event brings experience, but without power to turn back howsoever they repent. His relatives and friends gave Dante a wife, that his tears for Beatrice might have an end; but I know not whether for this (though the tears passed away, or rather, perhaps, had already passed), the amorous flame departed; yet I do not think it. But, even granted that it were quenched, many fresh burdens, yet more grievous, might take its place. He had been wont, keeping vigil at his sacred studies, to discourse whensoever he would with Emperors, with Kings, with all other most exalted Princes, to dispute with Philosophers, to delight himself with most pleasing Poets, and, giving heed to the anguish of others, to mitigate his own. Now he may be with these only so much as his new lady chooses; and what seasons it is her will shall be withdrawn from so illustrious

companionship, he must bestow on female chatter, which, if he will not increase his woes, he must not only endure but must extol. He who was wont, when weary of the vulgar herd, to withdraw into some solitary place, and there consider in his speculations what spirit moveth the heaven, whence cometh life to the animals that are on earth, what are the causes of things; or to rehearse some rare invention, or compose some poem, which shall make him though dead yet live by fame amongst the folk that are to come; must now not only leave these sweet contemplations as often as the whim seizes his new lady, but must submit to company that ill sorts with such like things. He, who was wont to laugh, to weep, to sing, to sigh, at his will, as sweet or bitter emotions pierced him, now dares it not; for he must needs render an account to his lady not only of greater affairs but of every little sigh, explaining what started it, whence it came, and whither it tended; for she takes gladness as evidence of love for another, and sadness of hatred for herself.

Oh, weariness beyond conception of having to live and hold intercourse, and finally grow old or die, with so suspicious an animal! I chose not to say ought of the new and most grievous cares which they who are

not used to them must bear, and especially in our city ; I mean, how to provide for clothes, and ornaments, and rooms crammed with curious superfluities that women make themselves believe are a support to an elegant existence ; how to provide for man and maidservants, nurses and chambermaids ; how to provide for entertainments, and for gifts and presents that have to be made to the relatives of newly married brides, to which brides the husbands wish to persuade these relatives they are devoted. Nor do I choose to speak of many other things following upon these, which free men never knew before ; but rather to come to certain things from which there is no escape. Who doubts that judgment will be passed by the general whether his wife be fair or no ? And, if she be reputed fair, who doubts but she will straightway have a crowd of lovers who will most pertinaciously besiege her unstable mind, one with his good looks and one with his noble birth and one with marvellous flattery and one with gifts and one with pleasant ways ? And that which many desire shall scarce be defended against everyone ; and women's chastity need only once be overtaken to make them infamous and their husbands miserable in perpetuity. But if, by misfortune of him who brings her home, she be foul to look upon,—well, it is plain to

see that even of the fairest women men often and quickly grow aweary, and what are we then to think of the others, save that not only they themselves, but every place which they are like to be found of them who must in needs have them for ever with them, will be detested? And hence springs up their wrath; nor is there any wild beast more cruel than an angry woman--no nor as much. Nor may any man live in safety of his life who hath committed him to any woman who thinketh she hath good cause to be in wrath against him. And they all think it.

What shall I say of their ways? Would I show how and how greatly they all run counter to the peace and repose of men, I must draw out my discourse to an all too long harangue; and therefore let me be content to speak of one, common to almost all. They imagine that any sorriest menial can keep his place in the house by behaving well, but will be cast out for the contrary. Wherefore they hold that if they themselves behave well theirs is no better than a servile lot; for they only feel that they are ladies when they do ill, but come not to the evil end that servants would. Why should I go on pointing out that which all the world knows? I judge it better to hold my tongue, than by my speech to give offence to lovely woman. Who doth

not know that trial is first made by him who should buy ere he take to himself any other thing, save only his wife,—lest she should displease him or ever he have her home? Whoso taketh her must needs have her not such as he would choose, but such as fortune yieldeth her to him. And if these things above be true (as he knoweth who hath tried) we may think what woes those chambers hide, the which from outside to whoso hath not eyes whose keenness can pierce through walls, are reputed places of delight.

Assuredly I do not affirm that these things chanced to Dante; for I do not know it; though true it is, that (whether such like things or others were the cause) when once he had parted from her (who had been given him as a consolation in his sufferings!) never would he go where she was, nor suffered her to come to where he was, albeit he was the father of several children by her. But let not any suppose that from the things said above I would conclude that men ought not to take to themselves wives. Contrariwise, I much commend it; but not for everyone. Let philosophers leave marrying to wealthy fools, to noblemen and peasants; and let them take their delight with philosophy, who is a far better bride than any other.

IT is the general nature of temporal things for one to involve another. Cares of the family drew Dante on to cares of the state, wherein the vain honours that are attached to public office so entangled him, that without considering whence he had departed nor whither he was going, with loosened rein he gave himself almost wholly up to the management of these things; and therein fortune was so favourable to him that never an embassy was heard nor answered, never a law enacted nor cancelled, never a peace made, never a public war undertaken, and in brief never a deliberation of any weight conducted, till he first had given his opinion thereon. On him all the public confidence, on him every hope, on him, to sum up, all affairs divine and human seemed to rest. But fortune, the revolver of our counsels, and the foe of all human stability, though she kept him for certain years at the summit of her wheel, in glorious supremacy, yet furnished him with an end far diverse from his beginning, when he trusted to her beyond measure.

The citizenship of Florence was most perversely divided, in his time, into two factions, each one of

which had great power by reason of the workings of full sagacious and prudent leaders that they had ; in so much that now one of them and now the other held sway, maugre its subjected rival. To bring back the divided body of his Commonwealth to unity Dante employed all his wit, and every art and every study ; pointing out to the most discreet of the citizens how great things swiftly come to nought by discord, and small things grow without limit by harmony. But when he saw that his labour was in vain, and perceived that the minds of his hearers were hardened, supposing it to be a judgment of God he at first purposed utterly to withdraw himself from every public office, and live in private to himself ; but afterward, drawn on by the sweetness of glory, and the vain favour of the people, and further by the persuasions of his elders, and beside all this thinking that should the occasion come he would be able to do far more good for his city if he were a great power in public affairs than as a mere private man, far removed from public place,—oh foolish longing for human splendours, how far mightier is thy strength than he who has not tried it would believe ! this man, in his mature age, brought up, nourished, and instructed in the bosom of Philosophy, having before his

eyes the fall of ancient kings and modern, the desolation of kingdoms, provinces and cities, the furious rushes of fortune which aim only at exalted things, yet had not the wit or had not the power to resist thy sweetness!

Dante then determined to pursue the fleeting honours and vain pomp of public offices; and, perceiving that he could not all alone support a third faction, which in its perfect justice should cast down the injustice of the other two and reduce them to unity, he consorted with the one which in his judgment had the greater measure of reason and of justice, ever working for that which he recognised as wholesome for his country and her citizens. But human counsels for the most part are defeated by the forces of the heaven. The hatreds and animosities conceived, even though sprung from no just cause, waxed greater day by day, in so much that more than once, to the utmost confusion of her citizens, they came to arms with intent to end their strife with fire and sword, so blinded by wrath that they saw not how they themselves would likewise miserably perish thereby. But after each of the factions had more than once given proof of its might, with mutual loss to both, the time arrived for threatening fortune to reveal her secret counsels. Wherefore Fame, who reports truth and falsehood

alike, announcing that the foes of that faction which Dante had chosen were strengthened by marvellous and cunning designs and an immense multitude of armed men, so terrified the chiefs of Dante's colleagues as to drive out of their minds every plan, every project, every thought, save how to flee in safety; together with whom Dante, hurled in a single moment from the height of government of his city, beheld himself not only cast down upon the ground but cast out from it. Not many days after which expulsion, the people having already rushed upon the houses of the exiles and furiously gutted and plundered them, the victors remodelled the constitution after their pleasure and condemned all the chief of their adversaries (including Dante, not as one of the lesser but almost as the supreme of all), to perpetual exile as arch-enemies of the Commonwealth. And their real property was either confiscated, or alienated to their victors.

This was the reward that Dante reaped for the tender love he had cherished for his country! This was the reward that Dante reaped for his toilsome efforts to remove the evil discords! This was the reward that Dante reaped for giving all his care to the good, the peace and the tranquillity of his fellow-citizens! Whereby it is manifest enough how void of

truth are the favours of the people, and what kind of faith a man should place in them. He in whom but now every public hope, all the affections of the citizens, every refuge of the people seemed to rest, of a sudden, for no rightful cause, for no offence nor crime, is furiously driven into irrevocable exile in obedience to that bare 'report' which had formerly been heard again and again bearing his praises to the very stars. This was the marble statue erected to him in eternal memory of his virtue! These the letters in which his name was inscribed amongst the fathers of the Fatherland on tablets of gold! These the fair reports in which thanks were rendered him for his benefits! Who, then, is he who shall consider these things and say that our Commonwealth doth not go halt upon this foot?

Oh, vain confidence of mortals, by how many loftiest examples art thou continually reprov'd, admonish'd and chastis'd! Alas! if Camillus, Rutilius, Coriolanus, and the one and the other Scipio, and the other ancient men of worth have fallen out of thy memory by the length of time between, yet let this recent instance make thee race with more temperate rein after thy pleasures. There is nought that hath less stability than the favour of the people; there is no insaner hope, no madder counsel, than that which

heartens any man to trust therein. Let men's minds then uplift themselves to heaven, in whose perpetual law, in whose eternal splendours, in whose true beauty may be recognised without a cloud the stability of him who moveth the one order of things and the other, accordant to reason; that, leaving transitory things, we may fix our every hope on him as on the fixed goal, would we ne'er find ourselves deceived.

When Dante had thus departed from the city of which not only was he a citizen but his ancestors had been the rebuilders, leaving behind him his wife, together with the rest of his family, whose youthful age ill adapted them to share his exile, without anxiety on her account, because he knew that she was related to one of the chiefs of the hostile faction, in uncertainty as to his own lot he wandered hither and thither through Tuscany. Some little portion of his possessions his wife had with difficulty defended from the rage of the citizens, under the title of her dowry, on the proceeds of which she provided in narrow style enough for herself and for his children; whilst he in his poverty must needs provide for his own sustenance by industry, to which he was all unused. Ah, what honourable indignation he must needs repress, harder for him to endure than death, hope promising him

that it should be but for a brief season and that his return was close at hand! But, contrary to his expectation, he remained year after year (turning from Verona, where he had gone to Messer Alberto della Scala on his first flight, and had been graciously received by him), now with the Count Salvatico in the Casentino, now with the Marquis Moruello Malespina in the Lunigiana, now with the Della Faggiola in the mountains near Urbino, held in much honour so far as consorted with the times and with their power. Thence he afterwards departed to Bologna, and staying but a little there, went on to Padua, and thence again to Verona. But when he saw the way of return closed up against him on every side, and day by day his hope became more vain, he abandoned not only Tuscany but Italy herself, and passing the mountains that divide her from the province of Gaul, he made his way as best he might to Paris; and there he gave himself up completely to the study of philosophy and of theology, gathering unto himself again such part of the other sciences also as perchance had been lost by reason of these impediments. And as he was studiously devoting his time to this, beyond his expectation it came to pass that Henry, Count of Luxemburg, with the good will and mandate of Pope Clement V., then in the

Chair, was elected King of the Romans, and afterwards crowned Emperor. And hearing that he had left Germany to subdue Italy, which was in part rebellious to his Majesty, and had already laid siege to Brescia with arm of might, Dante supposed for many reasons that he must prove victorious, and conceived the hope of returning to Florence by his power and by act of his justice, although he heard that Florence had taken side against him. Wherefore recrossing the Alps, joining with many foes of the Florentines and of their faction, he strove with them, both by embassies and by letters to draw the Emperor from the siege of Brescia, in order to lay siege to Florence, as the principal member of the foe, declaring that if she were overcome, little or no toil would remain to secure the possession and dominion of all Italy free and unimpeded. And although he and the rest who were aiming at this had their will in drawing him thereto, yet for all that, his coming had not the end they looked for. The resistance was most strenuous, and far beyond what they had foreseen; wherefore the Emperor, having accomplished nought of note, departed almost in despair, and directed his way to Rome. And although he accomplished divers things in one part and another, set much in order, and purposed doing much more,

yet his too early death broke up the whole ; whereat all in general who were looking to him were cast into despair, and Dante most of all ; wherefore no longer going about to seek his return he passed the heights of the Apennines and departed to Romagna, where his last day, that was to put an end to all his toils, awaited him.

In those times was Lord of Ravenna (a famous and ancient city of Romagna), a noble cavalier whose name was Guido Novello da Polenta ; he was well skilled in the liberal arts and held men of worth in highest honour, especially such as excelled others in knowledge. And when it came to his ears that Dante, beyond all expectation, was now in Romagna and in such desperate plight, he, who had long time before known his worth by fame, resolved to receive him and do him honour. Nor did he wait to be requested by him to do this, but considering with how great shame men of worth ask such favours, with liberal mind and with free proffers he approached him, requesting from Dante of special grace that which he knew Dante must needs have begged of him, to wit, that it might please him to abide with him. The two wills, therefore, of him who received and of him who made the request thus uniting on one same end, Dante, being highly pleased by the liberality of the noble cavalier,

and on the other side constrained by his necessities, awaited no further invitation but the first, and took his way to Ravenna, where he was honourably received by the Lord thereof, who revived his fallen hope by kindly fosterings; and giving him abundantly such things as were fitting, he kept him with him there for many years, yea, even to the last year of his life.

Never had his amorous longings, nor his grieving tears, nor his domestic anxieties, nor the seducing glory of public offices, nor his miserable exile, nor his unendurable poverty, been able with all their force to turn Dante aside from his main intent, to wit, from sacred studies; for as will be seen hereafter, when mention shall be made severally of the works that he composed, he will be found to have exercised himself in writing in the midst of all that is fiercest among these passions. And if in the teeth of such and so many adversaries as have been set forth above, he became by force of genius and of perseverance so illustrious as we see, what may we suppose he would have been if, like many another, he had had even as many supports; or, at least, had had no foes or but few? Indeed I know not. But were it lawful so to say, I would declare that he had surely become a God upon the earth.

Dante then having lost all hope of a return to

Florence, though he retained the longing for it, dwelt in Ravenna for a number of years under the protection of its gracious Lord. And here by his teachings he trained many scholars in poetry, especially in the vernacular, which vernacular to my thinking he first exalted and brought into repute amongst us Italians, no otherwise than did Homer his amongst the Greeks, or Virgil his amongst the Latins. Before him, though it is supposed that it had already been practised some short space of years, yet was there none who by the numbering of the syllables and by the consonance of the terminal parts, had the feeling or the courage to make it the instrument of any matter dealt with by the rules of art; or rather it was only in the lightest of love poems that they exercised themselves therein. But he showed by the effect that every lofty matter may be treated in it; and made our vernacular glorious above every other.

But since his hour is assigned to every man, Dante when already in the middle or thereabout of his fifty-sixth year, fell sick, and in accordance with the Christian religion received every sacrament of the Church humbly and devoutly, and reconciled himself with God by contrition for every thing that, being but man, he had done against his pleasure; and in the month of September in the years of Christ one

thousand three hundred and twenty-one, on the day whereon the exaltation of the holy cross is celebrated by the Church, not without greatest grief on the part of the aforesaid Guido, and generally all the other Ravennese citizens, he rendered up to his Creator his toiled spirit, the which I doubt not was received into the arms of his most noble Beatrice, with whom, in the sight of him who is the supreme good, the miseries of this present life left behind, he now lives most joyously in that life the felicity of which expects no end.

The magnanimous cavalier placed the dead body of Dante, adorned with poetic insignia, upon a funeral bier, and had it borne on the shoulders of his most distinguished citizens to the place of the Minor Friars in Ravenna, with such honour as he deemed worthy of such a corpse. And here, public lamentations as it were having followed him so far, he had him placed in a stone chest wherein he still lieth. And returning to the house in which Dante lately lived, according to the Ravennese custom he himself delivered an ornate and long discourse both in commendation of the profound knowledge and the virtue of the deceased, and in consolation of his friends whom he had left in bitterest grief. He purposed, had his estate and his life endured, to honour him with so choice a tomb that if never

another merit of his had made him memorable to those to come, this tomb should have accomplished it.

This laudable intent was in brief space of time made known to certain who in those days were most famous for poetry in Ravenna ; whereon each one for himself, to shew his own powers and to bear witness to the goodwill he had to the dead poet, and to win the grace and love of the Seigneur, who was known to have it at heart, made verses which, if placed as epitaph on the tomb that was to be, should with due praises teach posterity who lay therein. And these verses they sent to the glorious Seigneur, who, by great guilt of Fortune, in short space of time lost his estate ; and died at Bologna ; wherefore the making of the tomb and the placing of the verses thereon were left undone. Now when these verses were shewn to me long afterward, perceiving that they had never been put in their place, by reason of the chance already spoken of, and pondering on the present work that I am writing, how that it is not indeed a material tomb, but is none the less—as that was to have been—a perpetual preserver of his memory, I imagined that it would not be unfitting to add them to this work. But in as much as no more than the words of some one of them (for there were several) would have been cut upon the marble, so I held that only the words of one should be written

here : wherefore on examining them all I judged that the most worthy, for art and for matter, were fourteen verses made by Master Giovanni del Virgilio, the Bolognese, a most illustrious and great poet of those days, and one who had been a most special friend of Dante. And the verses are these, hereafter written :—

Theologus Dantes, nullius dogmatis expers,
Quod foveat claro philosophia sinu :
Gloria musarum, vulgo gratissimus auctor,
Hic iacet, et fama pulsat utrumque polum :
Qui loca defunctis, gladiis regnumque gemellis,
Distribuit, laicis rhetoricisque modis.
Pascua Pieriis demum resonabat avenis ;
Atropos heu letum livida rupit opus.
Huic ingrata tulit tristem Florentia fructum,
Exilium, vati patria cruda suo.
Quem pia Guidonis gremio Ravenna Novelli
Gaudet honorati continuisse ducis.
Mille trecentenis ter septem Numinis annis,
Ad sua septembris idibus astra redit.¹

¹[Theologic Dante, a stranger to no teaching that philosophy may cherish in her illustrious bosom ; glory of the Muses, author most acceptable to the commonalty ; lieth here, and smiteth either pole with his fame ; who assigned their places to the dead, and their jurisdictions to the twin swords, in laic and rhetoric modes. And lastly with Pierian pipe he was making the pasture lands resound ; black Atropos, alas, broke off the work of joy. For him ungrateful Florence bore the dismal fruit of exile, harsh fatherland to her own bard. But Ravenna's piety rejoices to have gathered him into the bosom of Guido Novello, her illustrious chief. In one thousand, three hundred and three times seven years of the Deity, he went back, on September's Ides, to his own stars.]

The 'twin swords' are the temporal and spiritual powers. The reference is to the *DE MONARCHIA*.

O H ungrateful fatherland ! What frenzy, what recklessness possessed thee—or doth still possess -- that thou didst chase into exile, with such strange cruelty, thy dearest citizen, thy chief benefactor, thy unique poet ? If perchance thou shouldst plead the common madness of that ill-counselled time, why when passions had abated didst thou not return to tranquillity of mind, and repenting of the deed, recall him ? Ah ! grudge not to stay awhile to discourse with me, who am a son of thine ; and thou shalt gather that which righteous indignation bids me speak, as from a man who longs for thee to amend and to be punished. Dost thou seem to thyself to be not glorified by such and so many titles that thou hast desired to chase away from thee that one wherein thou hast not a neighbouring city that can make a like vaunt ? Ah tell me ! With what victories, with what triumphs, with what excellencies, with what worthy citizens art thou resplendent ? Thy wealth, a thing fluctuating and uncertain ; thy beauty, a thing fragile and deciduous ; thy refinements, culpable and effeminate, make thee of note in the false judgment of the peoples, which doth ever look more to the appearance

than to the thing itself. Alas! wilt thou glory in thy merchants and the abundance of artists wherewith thou art filled? Foolishly wilt thou do. The first perpetually goaded by avarice, ply a servile trade; and the art which was once ennobled by men of genius till they made it a second nature is now corrupted by that same avarice and is nothing worth. Wilt thou glory in the baseness and worthlessness of them who, because they can quote a long string of ancestors, would fain hold in thy midst the chiefdom of that nobility against which they are for ever sinning with their plunderings, their treacheries, their falsehood? Vain will be thy vaunt, and mocked by all whose judgment hath a right base and a stable firmness. Ah wretched mother, open thine eyes! And gaze, not without remorse, on that which thou hast done; and take shame to thyself at least that being, as thou art, reputed wise, thou hast made the false choice in thy sins. Oh why, if thou had'st not so much wisdom of thyself, didst thou not imitate the acts of those cities which are still famous by reason of their praiseworthy deeds? Athens, which was one of the eyes of Greece, at the very time when there abode in her the supremacy of the world, glorious alike in knowledge, in eloquence and in war; Argos, still arrayed in the

pomp of the titles of her kings; Smyrna, ever to be revered by us for her pastor, Nicholas; Pylos, of highest note for the ancient Nestor; Cyme, Chios and Colophon, cities most glorious in time past; one and all, at the hour of their highest splendour, shamed not nor shrank from closing in sharp debate as to the origin of the divine poet Homer, declaring each one of them that he had drawn it from herself; and so did each one confirm her contention with arguments that the debate still lives; nor is it certain whence he was; since the one equally with the other still boasts of so great a citizen. And as to Mantua, our neighbour, in what else hath any greater fame remained to her than from Vergil's having been a Mantuan? whose name they yet hold in so great reverence, and so great acceptance hath it with each and all of them, that, not only in the public places but even in many private ones, his image is seen figured; showing thereby that albeit his father was but a maker of earthen pots, it is he who hath ennobled them all! Sulmona boasts of Ovid, Venusia of Horace, Aquinum of Juvenal, and many others each of its own, and insist on their merit. It had been no shame for thee to follow the example of these; who are not like to have been thus yearning and tender towards such citizens without due cause.

They knew what thou thyself hadst power to know, and still hast, to wit that the lasting influences of these men would be, even after their own ruin, eternal splendours of their name; even as to this day, extending throughout the whole world, they make them known to such as have never seen them. Thou alone, clouded by some strange blindness, hast chosen to take another path, and as though shining enough in thyself, hast been heedless of these splendours. Thou alone (as though the Camilli, the Publicolæ, the Torquati, the Fabricii, the Catos, the Fabii and the Scipios had made thee famous with their mighty works, and had abode in thee) not content with having let thy former citizen, Claudian, drop through thy fingers, hast taken no regard to the poet of to-day, but hast chased him away from thee into exile, and (if thou hadst had the power) bereft of the adjunct of thy name. I cannot escape from shame on thy behalf. But behold! not fortune but the course of the nature of things hath so far favoured thy shameful desire that what in thy brutal longing thou wouldst gladly have done had he come into thy hands, to wit slain him, it with its eternal law hath accomplished. Dead is thy Dante Alighieri, in that exile which thou, envious of his worth, didst unjustly inflict upon him. Oh shame

not to be chronicled, that a mother should bear envy to the virtues of any her son ! So now thou art freed from care, now by his death thou dost live untroubled in thy sins, and mayest make an end of that long and unjust persecution. Now that he is dead he cannot do against thee what when living he would never have done. He lieth under another heaven than thine, nor need'st thou look to see him ever again save on that day when thou shalt have leave to see all thy citizens, and see their faults by a just judge examined and punished.

And so if, as is held, hatred, wrath, and hostility are quenched by the death of whosoever dieth, begin now to return to thyself and to thy right mind. Begin to take shame at having done counter to thy former gentleness. Begin to desire to seem like a mother, and no longer a foe. Yield the tears that are due to thy son ; yield to him a mother's pity ; and whom when alive thou didst reject, nay chase into exile as one to be feared, desire to have back again at least when he is dead. Proffer thy citizenship, thy bosom, thy grace, to his memory. In truth, however ungrateful and tyrannical thou wast to him, he ever held thee in reverence as a son, nor ever desired to rob thee (as thou didst rob him of thy citizenship) of that honour which needs must cleave to thee because of his works.

Ever did he name himself and desire to be named a Florentine. However long his exile endured, yet did he ever place thee before any other city, and ever loved thee. What then wilt thou do? Wilt thou abide for ever obstinate in thy injustice? Shall there be less humanity in thee than in the Barbarians, whom we find not only to have demanded the bodies of their dead again, but to have been willing to die like men that they might have them back? Thou wouldst have the world believe thee to be grand-daughter of the illustrious Troy, and daughter of Rome. Surely the children should be like the parents and grandparents. Priam, in his misery, not only begged back the body of the dead Hector, but bought it again with its weight in gold. The Romans, as some seem to hold, had the bones of the first Scipio fetched from Miturnum, though at his death he had with reason enough forbidden that they should have them. And albeit Hector was by his valour the defence for long season of the Trojans, and Scipio was the liberator, not only of Rome, but of all Italy (neither of which two things, I suppose, can in the literal sense be said of Dante), yet is he not to be held their inferior; for never was the time that arms did not yield precedence to knowledge. If thou in the first instance, and when it would

most have beseemed thee, didst not imitate the example of the doings of those wise cities, make present amends by following them. Not one of the above said seven was there but raised to Homer a sepulchre real or fancied. And who doubts that the Mantuans, who still do honour in Pietola to the poor cabin and the fields that were Vergil's, would have given him honourable sepulture had not Octavianus Cæsar, who had transported his bones from Brundisium to Naples, declared it his will that the spot where he had placed them should be their perpetual resting place? Sulmona for long season wept, for naught else than that an island in Pontus somewhere held her Ovid; and in like manner Parma rejoices to possess Cassius. Do thou then go about to desire to be the guardian of thy Dante. Require him again. Make show of so much gentleness, even if thou hast no desire to have him back. Remove from thyself by this fiction some part of the blame thou hast acquired in the past. Demand him back. Certain I am that he will not be surrendered to thee; and at one and the same time thou shalt make show of piety and shalt rejoice (not having him back) in thine innate cruelty. But whereto am I urging thee? Scarce do I believe that, if dead bodies have any perception at all, Dante's body could endure

to depart from where it is for the sake of coming back to thee. He lieth in company far more desirable than any which thou couldst give him. He lieth in Ravenna, far more venerable than thee for antiquity; and though her age hath somewhat disfigured her, yet was she in her youth far more blooming than thee. She is like one great sepulchre of most holy bodies, nor can any part of her be trodden without passing over ashes most reverend. Who then would desire to come back to thee, and to have to lie amongst thine, which may be supposed still to preserve the madness and injustice they had in life, and, at ill accord one with another, each to shrink from the other no otherwise than did the flames of the two Thebans? And albeit Ravenna was in former times bathed with the precious blood of many a martyr, and still reverently preserves their remains, together with the bodies of many mighty Emperors and others most illustrious both for their ancestors and for their own virtuous deeds; yet doth she rejoice no little, for that it was granted to her over and above her other gifts to be the perpetual guardian of such a treasure as is the body of him whose works hold all the world in admiration, and of whom thou knewest not to make thee worthy. Yet surely her joy in having him is not so great as the envy she bears to

thee, because thou canst boast the title of his origin ; as though she were indignant that whereas she is held in remembrance because of his last day thou art named by her side in virtue of his first. And so do thou abide with thine ingratitude, and may Ravenna, rejoicing in honours that are rightly thine, take glory to herself amongst those to come.

SUCH as has been set forth above was the end of Dante's life, worn out by varied studies. And in as much as I think I have adequately related his flames, his domestic and public cares, his miserable exile and his end, according to my promise, I judge it well to go on to an account of his bodily stature, his dress, and generally the most notable ways that he observed in his life, proceeding thence at once to the noteworthy works that were composed by him in his day, troubled by so fierce a whirlwind as hath been briefly shewn above.

This our poet, then, was of middle height; and when he had reached maturity he went somewhat bowed, his gait grave and gentle, and ever clad in most seemly apparel, in such garb as befitted his ripe years. His face was long, his nose aquiline, and his eyes rather large than small; his jaws big, and the under lip protruding beyond the upper. His complexion was dark, his hair and beard thick, black, and curling, and his expression was ever melancholy and thoughtful. Hence it chanced one day in Verona (when the fame of his works had spread abroad everywhere, and especially that part of his Comedy which

he entitles Hell ; and when he himself was known by sight to many, both men and women), that as he passed by a gateway where sat a group of women, one of them said to the others, softly, yet so that she was heard well enough by him and by his company : ‘Do you see the man who goes to Hell, and comes again, at his pleasure ; and brings tidings up here of them that be below ?’ To the which one of the others answered in all good faith : ‘In truth it must needs be as thou sayest. See’st thou not how his beard is crisped and his skin darkened by the heat and smoke that are there below ?’ And hearing these words spoken behind him and perceiving that they sprang from the perfect belief of the women, he was pleased, and as though content that they should be of such opinion, he passed on, smiling a little. In his private and public manners he was wondrous orderly and composed, and in all things was he courteous and polished beyond any other. In food and drink he was most moderate, both in taking them at the appointed hours and in never going beyond the limit of necessity ; nor did he ever shew any nicety in one thing rather than another. Delicate viands he complimented, and for the most part fed on plain ones, blaming beyond measure such as bestow great part of their study on getting choice things

and having them prepared with extremest diligence ; declaring that the likes of these do not eat to live, but rather live to eat. No man kept vigil more than he, whether in studies or in any such other concern as might assail him ; in so much that many a time both his household and his wife were grieved thereat, until they grew used to his ways, and took no further note of it. Seldom did he speak save when questioned, and that deliberately and with voice suited to the matter of discourse ; not but what, when occasion rose, he was most eloquent and copious, and with excellent and ready delivery.

In his youth he took the greatest delight in music and song ; and with all the best singers and musicians of those times he was in friendship and familiarity ; and many a poem was he drawn on by this delight to compose, which he then caused to be clothed in pleasing and commanding melody by these his friends. How fervently he was subject to love hath been already set forth clearly enough ; and, in the firm belief of all, this love it was that moved his genius to vernacular poetry, first in the way of imitation ; then through longing to set forth his emotions more expressly, and to win glory, he eagerly exercised himself therein till he not only excelled all his contemporaries, but so

clarified and beautified the vernacular that then and thenceforth, he made and shall make many others desirous to become expert therein. In like manner he delighted to be alone and far removed from all folk, that his contemplations might not be broken in upon ; and if some thought that pleased him well should come upon him when in company, howsoever he should be questioned about aught he would answer his questioner never a word until he had either accepted or rejected this his imagination. And many times this chanced to him as he sat at table, or was journeying with companions, and elsewhere, too, when questioned.

In his studies he was most assiduous, during such time as he assigned to them ; in so much that nothing, however startling to hear, could distract him from them. And as concerning this giving himself up wholly to the thing that pleased him, there are certain, worthy of faith, who relate how one of the times when he was in Siena he chanced to be at an apothecary's shop, and there a little book that had been promised him before was placed in his hand, which book was of much fame amongst men of worth, and had never yet been seen of him ; and, as it befell, not having opportunity to take it to some other place he lay with his breast upon the bench that stood before the apothecary's and set

the book before him and began most eagerly to examine it ; and although soon after, in that very district, right before him, by occasion of some general festival of the Sienese, a great tournament was begun and carried through by certain young gentlemen, and therewith the mightiest din of them around—as in like cases is wont to come about, with various instruments and with applauding shouts—and although many other things took place such as might draw one to look on them, as dances of fair ladies, and sundry sports of youth, yet was there never a one that saw him stir thence, nor once raise his eyes from the book ; nay rather, he having placed himself there about the hour of noon, it was past vespers, and he had examined it all and as it were taken a general survey thereof, ere he raised himself up from it ; declaring afterwards, to certain who asked him how he could hold himself from looking upon so fair festivities as had been done before him, that he had perceived naught at all of them ; whereat for his questioners a second wonder was not unduly added to the first.

Moreover, this poet was of marvellous capacity and firmness of memory, and of piercing intellect, in so much that when he was in Paris, and in a disputation *de quolibet* held there in the schools of theology

fourteen theses had been maintained by divers men of worth on divers matters, he straightway gathered all together, with the arguments for and against urged by the opponents, and in due sequence, as they had been produced, recited them without break, following the same order, subtly solving and refuting the counter arguments; the which thing was reputed all but a miracle by them that stood by. Of most exalted genius was he likewise, and subtle invention, as his works make far more manifest to such as understand than could my letters. He longed most ardently for honour and glory; perchance more than befitted his illustrious virtue. But what then! What life so humble that it is not touched by the sweetness of glory? And by reason of this longing I suppose it was that he loved poetry beyond all other study, seeing that albeit philosophy transcends all others in nobility, yet her excellence can be communicated only to a few, and there are many who have fame therein throughout the world; whereas poetry is more conspicuous and giveth more delight to each and all, and poets are exceeding few. And therefore, hoping that by poesy he might achieve the unwonted and imposing honour of the crown of laurel, he gave himself all to her, both in study and composition. And of a surety his desire

would have come to pass had fortune been so gracious to him as to suffer him ever to return to Florence ; for in her alone, and over the font of San Giovanni was he disposed to take the crown, to the end that where he had taken his first name by baptism, in that same place he might take his second name by coronation. But it came so to pass that, albeit his merit was great, even such that in whatsoever place he would he might have had the honour of the laurel (which, though it increase not knowledge, yet is the most certain token and adornment of its acquisition) yet because he awaited just that return which was never to come about, he would receive it in no other place. And so he died without the much desired honour. But in so much as the question is often raised by readers, what poetry and the poet are, and whence this name has come, and wherefore poets be crowned with laurel ; and few, methinks, have shewn it forth ; therefore I think fit here to make a certain digression wherein somewhat to explain all this, returning so soon as I may to the purpose.

THE ancient folk, in early ages, however rude and uncultured, were full of ardour to learn the truth by study, even as we still see to be the natural desire of every man : and perceiving the heaven to move continuously by law and order, and the things of earth to observe a certain order and produce diverse operations in diverse seasons, they conceived that there must of necessity be somewhat wherefrom all these things proceeded, which ordained all the rest as the supreme power, empowered by nought else save itself. And having diligently tracked out all this in their minds, they imagined that this being (to the which they gave the name of Divinity or Deity) should be venerated with every observance and with every honour and with more than human service ; and therefore they ordained to the revering of the name of this supreme power most ample and excellent dwellings, the which they opined should be distinguished in name, like as they were distinguished in form, from those dwelt in by mankind at large ; and so they called them Temples. And likewise they appointed certain ministers who should be consecrated men set aside

from every other earthly care and devoted only to the divine services, venerable above other men by ripeness, by age, and by costume. And these they called priests. And beyond this, to make presentment of the divine being they had conceived, they made magnificent statues in varied forms; and for the service of this being they made vessels of gold, and marble tables, and purple vestments, and many other appliances pertaining to the sacrifices they had instituted. And lest only silent and as it were dumb honour should be paid to this power, they conceived that by words of lofty sound it should be made to incline to them and be propitious to their needs. And like as they deemed this being to exceed all others in nobleness, so they would have words remote from all plebeian or common style of speech worthy to be pronounced in the presence of the Deity wherein to proffer sacred blandishments to the same. And beyond this, in order that these words might seem to have more power they were minded to compose them under the law of fixed numbers, whereby a certain sweetness should be perceived, and weariness and languor should be dispelled. And of a surety this should not be accomplished in vulgar and customary form but of necessity with style artful, elaborate, and novel; which form the Greeks called *poetes*; whence it arose

that whatsoever was made in that form was called *poesis*; and they who invented or practised this style of discourse were called *poeti*. This then was the first origin of the name of poetry, and so of poets; and albeit others may assign other reasons, which may be good ones, this is the one that most pleaseth me.

This fair and praiseworthy intention of the rude age moved many to devices, as the world grew, by way of embellishment; and whereas at first they honoured one only deity, in later times they set forth that there were many of them, albeit they declared that that One held the chieftainship above all other. And these numerous deities, they held, were the Sun, the Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, and every other of the seven planets, arguing from their effects to their deity; and from them they went on to set forth how everything is a deity which is useful to men, howsoever earthly, such as fire, water, earth and their likes; to all of which they assigned verses and honours and sacrifices. And then in sequence they began severally in the several regions one by one to devise, and one by another to make themselves masters of the ignorant multitude of their districts, determining rude disputes not according to written law (which they had not as yet) but according to a natural equity wherewith one more than another was endowed;

regulating the life and manners of the rest by their own natural enlightenment, resisting with bodily might adverse things that might come to pass; and calling themselves kings, and displaying themselves before the people surrounded by servants, and pomp unused by men before those times, exacting obedience, and at last causing themselves to be worshipped. And this (provided only that any presumed so far) was brought about with no great difficulty, in as much as to the rude people who saw them in this guise they appeared not to be men but gods. And those of whom I have told, not trusting to their own might, began to develop religious rites, and by means of faith in them to strike terror into their subjects, and compel to their obedience by oaths such as they could never have obliged by force. And beyond this they took heed to deify their fathers and their grandfathers and ancestors that they might be the more feared and held in reverence of the vulgar. And all this could not well be done without the offices of the poets, who, both to extend their own fame and to win the favour of the princes and to delight their subjects and to enjoin virtuous action upon each and all, accomplished with varied and consummate fictions (ill understood by the gross multitude even now, to say nought of that early time) that which

to utter in open speech would have been clear against their purpose, to wit, that what the princes desired to be believed should be believed in truth ; observing with respect to the new gods, and the men whom they would make the offspring of gods, that same style which their predecessors had used with respect to the true God only and his blandishment. The next step was to declare the deeds of brave men equal to those of the gods ; and hence arose the practice of singing in lofty verse of battles and other noteworthy feats of men mingled with those of the gods ; which was and still is, together with the other aforesaid things, the office and exercise of every poet. And inasmuch as many who have not understanding suppose that poetry is naught else save only a fabulous discourse, it is my pleasure beyond the foregoing briefly to demonstrate that poetry is Theology, ere I go on to tell why poets are crowned with laurel.

If we would set our minds to work and look at the thing with reason, I suppose we shall easily be able to see that the ancient poets imitated (so far as is possible to human wit) the footprints of the Holy Spirit. Even as we see that in the divine Scripture he revealed through many months his deepest secrets to those who were to come, making them utter under a veil that

which in due Season he purposed to make manifest without a veil in actual deed. Insomuch that they (if we closely examine their works), in order that the copy should appear no other than the model, described under cover of certain fictions the things which had been, or that were present to their own age, or that they desired or presumed must needs come to pass in the future. Wherefore, albeit the goal contemplated by the one and the other Scripture was not the same, but only the mode of treatment (on which my mind is at present chiefly fixed) to both the two may be given one and the same commendation in the words of Gregory, who says of the sacred what may also be said of the poetic Scripture, to wit, that in one and the same discourse it reveals the text and the mystery that lies beneath it, and so at one and the same time exercises the wise with the one and encourages the simple with the other, producing openly that wherewith to give children suck and reserving in secret that wherewith it holds the minds of sublime students suspended with admiration. Wherefore it seems to be, so to speak, a river both shallow and deep, wherein the little lamb may wade with its feet and the great elephant may swim with ample space. But we must now proceed to make good the things that we have laid down.

IT is the purpose of divine Scripture (which is what we mean by *Theology*), now under figure of some history, now by the meaning of some vision, now by the purport of some lamentation, and in many another fashion, to set forth to us the high mystery of the incarnation of the divine Word, his life, the things that chanced at his death, his victorious resurrection, his marvellous ascension, and every other act of his; instructed whereby we may come to that glory which he revealed to us, both in his death and in his resurrection, after it had long been barred against us by the sin of the first man. And in like manner the poets in their works (which are what we mean by *Poesy*), now under the fictions of diverse gods, now under the transformations of men into vain forms, and now with winsome pleadings, set forth to us the causes of things, the results of virtues and of vices, what we are to flee and what pursue, in order that by virtuous doing we may come to that goal which they, who had no right knowledge of the true God, regarded as the highest blessedness. The Holy Spirit was minded to set forth in that greenest bush wherein Moses beheld

God, as under fashion of a burning flame, that her virginity who was pure beyond every other creature, and who was destined to become the abode and receptacle of the Lord of nature, should receive no attainment by conceiving, nor by bearing the Word of the Father. He was minded, by the vision seen by Nebuchadnezzar in the statue composed of many metals, shattered by a stone that turned into a mountain, to set forth how all the preceding ages should be submerged by the death of Christ, who was and is a living stone, and how the Christian religion, born from this stone, should come to be unmovable and perpetual like as we see the mountains. He was minded in the Lamentations of Jeremiah to declare the coming fall of Jerusalem.

In like fashion our poets, feigning that Saturn had many children and that he devoured them all save four, were minded to signify naught else to us by Saturn save time, wherein everything is produced, and like as everything is produced in it, so is it the destroyer of all things, and reduces all things to naught. As for his four sons whom he devoured not, the first is Jove, to wit the element of fire; the second is Juno, wife and sister of Jove, to wit the air, through the mediation of which fire accomplishes all its effects down here;

the third is Neptune, god of the sea, to wit the element of water ; the fourth and last is Pluto, god of hell, to wit earth, lowest of all the elements. In like manner our poets feigned that Hercules was transformed from a man to a god, and Lycaon to a wolf ; giving us to understand, in the moral order, that by doing virtuously, as did Hercules, man becomes a god by participating in heaven, and by doing viciously, as did Lycaon, albeit he seem to be a man, he may in truth be called that beast which by common consent is characterised by doings most akin to his special vice ; just as Lycaon by reason of his rapacity and avarice, which are wholly fitting to the wolf, is feigned to have been changed into one. In like fashion our poets invented the beauty of the Elysian fields, by which I understand the sweetness of heaven ; and the darkness of Dis, whereby I understand the bitterness of hell ; in order that, attracted by the joy of the one and terrified by the affliction of the other, we might pursue the virtues which will lead us to Elysium, and flee the vices which would make us cross the bank to Dis. I will grind these things no finer in detailed exposition, because had I a mind to explain them at the fitting length to which they could be stretched, albeit they would themselves grow in attractiveness and my argument would be further

strengthened thereby, I doubt they would draw me much further on than my main theme demands, or than I am willing to go.

And surely were no more said than what has already been set forth, there should be no difficulty in understanding that Theology and Poesy agree in the way in which they go to work. But in their subject matter I affirm that they are not only quite diverse, but also in some sort adverse; because the subject of sacred Theology is the divine truth, that of ancient Poetry the gods of the Gentiles and men. They are opposed to each other in as much as Theology presupposes naught save what is true, whereas Poesy supposes certain things as true which are most false and erroneous and counter to the Christian religion. But inasmuch as certain witless ones lift themselves up against the poets, declaring that they have composed foul and evil stories, which conform to no kind of truth, and that they ought to have shown their talent and given instruction to the lay world in some other way than by their stories, I am minded to go somewhat further with the present discourse.

Let those then of whom I speak consider the visions of Daniel, of Isaiah, of Ezekiel, and of the others in the Old Testament; visions endited with divine pen,

and revealed by him who had no beginning and shall have no end. Let them further consider, in the New Testament, the visions of the Evangelist, full of marvellous truth to whoso understandeth, and if they can find any poetic fiction as remote from truth or verisimilitude as these visions in many parts appear to be on the surface, then let it be granted that the Poets, and they alone, have uttered fables which can give neither pleasure nor profit. I might now pass on without saying another word to repel their attack upon the Poets for setting forth their teaching in fables, or under the guise of fables; knowing that whilst they madly rebuke the Poets in this matter they fall unawares into reviling that Spirit which is no other than the Way, the Life, and the Truth. But I purpose, for all that, to say something to meet their objections.

It is a thing plain to see that whatever is gained by toil hath a certain sweetness over and above that which cometh without effort; so that the plain truth, in as much as it is swiftly understood, gives delight and passes into memory with but little force. Wherefore, in order that being gained with toil it should be the more loved and therefore the better preserved, the Poets concealed it under things quite counter to it in appearance; and so they composed their fables in preference

to any other disguise, that their beauties might draw such as neither the demonstrations of philosophy nor her persuasions would have been able to attract. What then shall we say of the Poets ? Are we to hold them for the witless wights, which they who themselves lack wit in our own day and talk of they know not what declare them to be ? Nay verily ! Rather was there profoundest meaning in what they did, as concerns the hidden fruit, and most excellent and ornate eloquence as concerns the bark and leaves that outwardly appear. But let us return to the point we had reached.

I say that Theology and Poesy may be considered to be almost one and the same thing, in such parts wherein their subject is one ; nay, I say further that Theology is naught else than a certain Poesy of God. And what else than a poetic fiction is it in Scripture to say now that Christ is a lion, and now a lamb, and now a worm, and now a dragon, and now a rock, and many other figures which to attempt to enumerate were long indeed ? What else do the words of the Saviour, uttered in the Gospel pronounce, save a discourse remote from the sense, which kind of speech we are wont to call allegory ? Wherefore it doth well appear not only that Poesy is Theology, but also that Theology is Poesy. And truly if my words should deserve

but little faith in so great a matter I shall not be troubled thereat ; but let faith be given to Aristotle, a most worthy witness in any matter of great import, who affirms that he has found the Poets to have been the first Theologians. And let this suffice for this part, and let us turn to the demonstration why to the Poets alone, amongst men of knowledge, the honour of the laurel crown was granted.

Amongst all the many nations on the circuit of the earth, the Greeks are held to have been the first to whom Philosophy revealed herself and her secrets ; and from her treasures they drew military science, political organisation, and many other precious things, whereby they became famous and revered beyond every other nation. Now amongst the rest that they drew from her treasure was that most sacred opinion of Solon set at the beginning of this work ; and in order that their Commonwealth, which in those days flourished above all others, should go and stand erect upon its two feet they made and observed majestic ordinances concerning the punishment of the guilty and rewarding of the worthy. And amongst the other rewards established by them for whoso should have done well, this was the chief: to crown with laurel leaves in public and with public assent, Poets, when their toils had been

triumphant, and Commanders, when they had victoriously strengthened their Commonwealth ; judging that equal glory was due to him by whose valour human things were preserved and enlarged, and him by whom divine things were handled. And albeit the Greeks were the inventors of this honour, it afterwards passed to the Latins, when alike the glory and the arms of all the world made way for the Roman name. And as to the crowning of Poets, at least (though it very rarely comes to pass), the custom yet abides with them. But why the laurel more than any other leaf should be chosen for this coronation it will not be unpleasing to consider.

There are some who, in as much as they know that Daphne was loved of Phœbus and was transformed into a laurel, hold that since Phœbus was the first patron and fosterer of poets, and since he likewise had his triumphs, he was moved by the love that he bore to these leaves to crown his lyres and his triumphs with them ; and that men took example hence, so that what Phœbus did in the first instance, was the cause of this crowning, and of the use of these leaves, for Poets and Commanders, even to this day. And truly I have naught to say against this opinion, nor do I deny that so it may have been ; but none the less there is another

account of it which the rather appeals to me, which is the following. As they have it who look into the nature and the virtues of plants, the laurel has amongst its excellent and noteworthy properties these three: first that as is plain to see it never loses its verdure nor its foliage; the second is that this tree is never found to have been struck by lightning, which is not recorded to be the case with any other; the third that it is very sweet smelling, even as we all perceive; which three properties they who of old devised this honour held to consort with the virtuous deeds of poets and of victorious commanders. And first, the perpetual verdure of these leaves (they said) sets forth that the fame of the deeds of those who have been crowned and shall hereafter be crowned by them is destined ever to abide in life; and further they held that the deeds of such had so great might that neither the flame of envy nor the thunderbolt of length of time which consumes all things should ever have power to blast them, any more than the bolt of heaven strikes that tree; and beyond this they declared that their deeds should never by lapse of time become less pleasing and winning to whoso should hear them or read them, but should be ever acceptable and of good odour. Wherefore a crown of such leaves was rightly deemed more

fitting than another to the men whose doings (in so far as we can perceive) were conformable thereto. Wherefore it was not without cause that our Dante longed most ardently for such honour, or rather such testimony of so great virtue, as is this crowning, to such as make themselves worthy of having their temples so adorned. But it is time to return to the point whence we departed when we entered on this matter.

OUR poet, beside the things aforesaid, was of a very lofty and proud disposition; in so much that when a certain friend of his, incited thereto by his prayers, strove to bring about his return to Florence (for which he longed to the very utmost, above all else), and could find no other way thereto with those who then had the direction of the Commonwealth in their hands save only this: that for a certain space he should abide in prison, and thereafter at some public solemnity should be presented as an offering, by way of mercy, at our principal church, and should then be free and released from every sentence previously passed upon him; he deeming that the like of this was fitting and was in use only for men abject and infamous, and for no other, therefore, for all his supreme longing, chose rather to abide in exile than to return by such a path to his home. Oh worthy and magnanimous Scorn, how didst thou play the man in repressing the ardent longing for return by a path less than worthy of him who was nurtured in the lap of a philosophy!

After like manner he took full much to himself; nor, as those of his day report, did he deem himself of

lesser worth than in truth he was. The which appeared once, amongst other times, most notably, whilst he was with his faction at the highest point of the government of the Commonwealth. For when they who were undermost had, by mediation of Pope Boniface VIII., summoned a brother or relative of Philip, then king of France, whose name was Charles, to make straight the affairs of our city, all the chief men of that faction with which Dante held, assembled in council to make provision against this; and there, amongst other things they ordained that an embassy should be sent to the Pope, who was then at Rome, to induce him to oppose the coming of the said Charles, or make him come in concert with the party which was then in power. And when they came to consider who should be chief of this embassy they all said that it must be Dante; to which request Dante, after pondering in himself for a space, replied, 'If I go, who stays? If I stay, who goes?' As though he alone amongst all the others had any worth, or gave any worth to the rest. This saying was understood and laid up; but what came of it doth not make for our present purpose, wherefore I pass on and let it be.

Besides these things this great man bore all his adversities with the utmost fortitude; save that in one

thing I know not whether I should call him impatient or passionate, to wit in the affair of the factions, more than became his worth, and more than he would have had believed of him by others. And to the end that it may appear what the faction was to which he gave himself with such passion and pertinacity, I think fit to write on a little further and tell. It was permitted, as I take it, by the just wrath of God that long ago almost all Tuscany and Lombardy should divide into two factions; of the which (though I know not whence they had these names) the one called and calls itself the Guelf party, and the other was called the Ghibelline. And of such power and reverence were these two names in the foolish minds of many, that to defend the one which a man had chosen against its opponent it was an easy thing for him to sacrifice his goods and if need arose even his very life. And under these names the cities of Italy many a time endured the most grievous straits and upheavals; our city amongst the rest, being as it were the head of the one name or the other according as the citizens veered about; in so much that Dante's forebears, as Guelfs, had twice been chased from their homes by the Ghibellines, and in like manner he had himself held the reins of the Commonwealth in Florence, under the Guelf title; whence being

afterwards banished, as hath been shewn, not by the Ghibellines but by the Guelfs, and perceiving that he might not return, he so swung his mind about that there was no fiercer Ghibelline than he, nor more opposed to the Guelfs. And that for which I most blush, in the interest of his memory, is that in Romagna it is matter of greatest notoriety that any feeble woman or little child who had but spoken, in party talk, in condemnation of the Ghibelline faction would have stirred him to such madness as to move him to hurl stones at such, had they not held their peace ; and in such bitterness he lived even until his death. And assuredly I blush to be forced to taint the fame of such a man with any defect ; but the order of things on which I have begun in some sort demands it ; because that if I hold my peace concerning those things in him which are less worthy of praise, I shall withdraw much faith from the praiseworthy things already recounted. So do I plead my excuse to him himself, who perchance, even as I write, looketh down with scornful eye from some lofty region of heaven. Amid all the virtue, amid all the knowledge, that hath been shewn above to have belonged to this wondrous poet, lechery found most ample place not only in the years of his youth but also of his maturity ; the which vice, though it be natural,

and common, and scarce to be avoided, yet in truth is so far from being commendable that it cannot even be suitably excused. But who amongst mortals shall be a righteous judge to condemn it? Not I. Oh the infirmity, oh the brutish appetite of men! What power cannot women exercise over us when they choose, seeing what great things they can do even when they choose not? Attractiveness and beauty and natural appetite and many other things are working for them without pause in the hearts of men. And that this is true we will not call to witness what Jove did for Europa, Hercules for Iole, and Paris for Helen, because, in as much as these are matters of poesy, many might have so little perception as to call them fables, but let the demonstration be drawn from cases which it befits no one to deny. Was there as yet more than one only woman in the world, when our first father (transgressing the commandment given to him by the very mouth of God) sided with her persuasions? Verily, no. And David, notwithstanding he had so many of them, only having seen Bersabè, forgot, for her sake, God, and his kingdom, and himself, and his honour, and became first an adulterer and then a murderer. What are we to suppose he would have done had she laid any command upon him? And did not Solomon, to whose pitch of

wisdom none save only the Son of God ever attained, abandon him who had made him so wise, and, to please a woman, bend his knee and worship Balaam? And what did Herod? What did many others drawn by naught else save by their pleasure? Amongst so many and such companions, then, our poet may pass by, not excused, but accused with a much less knitted brow than had he been alone. And let it suffice for now to have said thus much of his most noteworthy ways.

THIS glorious poet composed many works in his time, of which I think it were well to make orderly enumeration, lest some other be credited with any of his works, or by chance some work of another be attributed to him. Firstly, while his tears were still flowing for the death of his Beatrice, about in his twenty-sixth year, he put together in a little volume, which he called the *Vita Nuova*, certain small things, as Sonnets and Odes, which he had made in rhyme at diverse seasons theretofore, marvellously beautiful, placing at the head of each severally and in order the occasions that had moved him to write it, and adding the divisions of the poems after them. And although in his maturer years he took much shame to himself for having written this little book, nevertheless when his age is considered 'tis a right fair and pleasant thing, and especially for the unlettered.

Certain years after this compilation, as he looked down from the height of the government of the Commonwealth, on which he stood, and saw over a wide stretch, as from such places may be seen, what was the life of men and what the errors of the common

herd, and how few they be who depart therefrom, and of how great honour worthy, and they who side therewith worthy of how great confusion ; condemning the pursuits of such as these and commending his own far above them ; there came into his mind a lofty thought whereby he purposed, at the same time, that is in one same work, whilst shewing forth his own power, to reprehend the vicious with most grievous pains, and honour the worthy with loftiest rewards, and gain perpetual glory for himself. And since, as already set forth, he had preferred poetry before every other pursuit, he purposed to make his work poetic ; and having long premeditated that which he must do he began in his thirty-fifth year to give himself to bringing to effect that which he had already premeditated ; to wit, how, after their merits, he should reprehend and reward the life of men, according to its diversity. And since he perceived that this life was after three manners, to wit, the vicious life, and the life departing from vice and making for virtue, and the virtuous life, he divided his work wondrously into three books, beginning with the reprehending of the vicious life, and ending with the reward of the virtuous ; and he called the whole the *Comedy*. Each one of the which three books he divided into cantos, and the cantos into lines, as may be clearly

seen. And he composed it in vernacular rhyme, with so great art, and such marvellous and beauteous arrangement, that there hath not yet been any who might reprehend it justly in any point. Howsubtly he poetised therein throughout, they may perceive to whom hath been lent such understanding that they may comprehend it. But even as we see that great things may not be carried through in brief space, and even as we must comprehend, accordingly, that so lofty, so great, and so thought-out an emprise as was the bringing poetically of all the acts of men and their deserts under rhymed verses in the vernacular, could not by possibility be brought to an end within short space, especially by one tossed on so many and varied chances of fortune, all of them full of anguish and envenomed with bitterness, as we have seen was the hap of Dante, even so (albeit, as will appear, he composed other works meanwhile, notwithstanding that he was engaged on this) it came to pass that from the hour aforesaid when he gave himself up to so lofty an undertaking even to the extreme of his life, his toil therein was unbroken. Nor will it be superfluous to touch, in some sort, on certain incidents that came to pass concerning the beginning and the end of this work.

I SAY that when he was most intent on his glorious work, and had already composed seven cantos of the first part thereof, the which he entitles *Hell*, conducting his invention wondrously and poetising not a whit as a Pagan, but in most Christian fashion (a thing ne'er done before under sanction of this name), there came upon him the grievous chance of his banishment, or flight, whichever we should call it ; whereon he must abandon both this and all things else, and go wandering for many years, uncertain of his lot, amongst divers friends and Seigneurs. But even as we must believe very certainly that what God ordains Fortune cannot by aught that she may oppose against it restrain from its due end, even if she may perhaps interpose some delay, it came to pass that a certain one was searching amongst Dante's things for a special writing (of which perchance he had need) in certain chests that had been hastily rescued and deposited in sacred places, what time the ungrateful and disordered mob had riotously rushed upon his house, seeking plunder rather than just revenge ; and there he found the first seven cantos that had been composed by Dante, the which he read with admiration,

not knowing what they were; and taking extreme delight in them he withdrew them by guile from the place where they were and took them and shewed them to a citizen of ours whose name was Dino di Messer Lambertuccio, who had great fame in those days, in Florence, as a poet in rhyme. And when Dino saw them, being a man of lofty intellect, he marvelled, no less than he who had brought them to him, both at the beautiful and polished and ornate style of speech, and at the depth of the meaning which he seemed to see hidden under the fair crust. For which reasons, and also because of the place whence they had been taken, both he and the one who had brought them readily supposed them to be, as indeed they were, the work of Dante. And grieving that this work had been left uncompleted, and that they could not themselves divine to what end it would have reached, they consulted together to search out where Dante was, and to send him what they had found, so that, if possible, he might give the end he had imagined to such a beginning. And learning after some enquiry that he was with the Marquis Moruello, they wrote not to himself but to the Marquis to tell their desire, and sent him the seven cantos. And when the Marquis, a man of much understanding, had seen them and much praised

them in himself, he shewed them to Dante and asked him if he knew whose work they were. And Dante, instantly recognising them, answered that they were his own. Then the Marquis besought him to be pleased not to leave so lofty a beginning without its due conclusion. 'Of a surety,' saith Dante, 'I supposed that, in the ruin of all that was mine, these and many other books of mine to boot had perished, and therefore, what with this belief, and what with the crowd of other toils that have fallen upon me by reason of my exile, I had wholly abandoned the lofty phantasy I had arrested for this work; but since fortune in this unlooked-for fashion hath again thrust them upon me, and since it is thy pleasure, I will seek to call again to memory my first intent, and will proceed therewith as grace shall be given me.' And taking up again, not without toil and time, the abandoned phantasy he followed on:—

'Io dico, seguitando, che assai prima,' etc.,

where the joining on of the interrupted work may be recognised clear enough by whoso considereth well.

Recommencing then his glorious work, Dante, I take it, did not lead it to a close, as many might think, without ever breaking it off; but many a time, according as the gravity of the chances that befell him required,

sometimes for months, sometimes for years, he left it where it was, unable to do aught for it. Nor could he make such speed with it as to be able to make all of it public ere death came upon him. It was his wont, whenever he had done six or eight cantos, more or less, to send them from whatever place he was in, before any other had seen them, to Messer Cane della Scala, whom he held in reverence above all other men; and when he had seen them Dante gave access to them to whoso desired. And having sent to him in this fashion all save the last thirteen cantos, which he had finished but had not yet sent him, it came to pass that, without bearing it in his mind that he was abandoning them, he died. And when they who were left behind, children and disciples, had searched many times, in the course of many months, amongst all his papers, if haply he had composed a conclusion to his work, and could by no means find the remaining cantos; and when every admirer of his in general was enraged that God had not at least lent him to the world so long that he might have had opportunity to finish what little remained of his work; they had abandoned further search in despair since they could by no means find them.

So Jacopo and Piero, sons of Dante, both of them poets in rhyme, moved thereto by certain of their

friends, had taken it into their minds to attempt to supplement the parental work, as far as in them lay, that it might not remain imperfect, when to Jacopo, who was far more zealous than the other in this work, there appeared a wondrous vision, which not only checked his foolish presumption but shewed him where were the thirteen cantos which were wanting to this divine Comedy and which they had not known to find. A worthy man of Ravenna, whose name was Piero Giardino, long time a disciple of Dante's, related how when eight months had passed after the death of his master, the aforesaid Jacopo came to him one night, near to the hour that we call mattins, and told him that that same night a little before that hour he, in his sleep, had seen his father, Dante, approach him, clad in whitest garments, and his face shining with an unwonted light; whom he seemed to ask if he were yet living, and to hear in reply that he was, but in the true life, not in ours. Whereon he seemed further to ask him if he had finished his work or ever he passed to that true life; and, if he had finished it, where was the missing part which they had never been able to find. To this he seemed to hear again in answer, 'Yea! I finished it.' Whereon it seemed that he took him by the hand and led him to that chamber where

he was wont to sleep when he was living in this life ; and touching a certain spot, he said, ‘ Here is that which ye so long have sought.’ And no sooner was uttered that word than it seemed that both Dante and sleep departed from him at the same moment. Wherefore he averred that he could not hold but come and signify what he had seen, that they might go together and search in the place indicated to him, which he held most perfectly stamped on his memory, to see whether a true spirit or a false delusion had shewn it him. Wherefore, since a great piece of the night still remained, they departed together and went to the place indicated, and there found a mat fixed to the wall, which they lightly raised, and found a recess in the wall which neither of them had ever seen, nor knew that it was there ; and there they found certain writings, all mouldy with the damp of the wall, and ready to rot had they stayed there much longer ; and when they had carefully removed the mould and read, they saw that they contained the thirteen cantos so long sought by them. Wherefore, in great joy, they copied them out, and, after the author’s wont, sent them first to Messer Cane, and then joined them on, as was meet, to the imperfect work. In such manner did the work of so many years see its completion.

THE question is moved at large by many men, and amongst them sapient ones, why Dante, a man perfectly versed in knowledge, chose to write in the Florentine idiom so grand a work, of such exalted matter, and so notable, as this his Comedy; and why not rather in Latin verses, as the other poets before him had done. In reply to which question, two chief reasons, amongst many others, come to my mind. The first of which is, that he might be of more general use to his fellow-citizens and the other Italians; for he knew that if he had written metrically in Latin as the other poets of past times had done, he would only have done service to men of letters, whereas, writing in the vernacular, he did a deed ne'er done before, and (without any let to men of letters whereby they should not understand him) shewing the beauty of our idiom and his own excelling art therein, gave delight and understanding of himself to the unlearned who had hitherto been abandoned of everyone. The second reason which moved him thereto was this. Seeing that liberal studies were utterly abandoned, and especially by the princes and other great men, to whom poetic

toils were wont to be dedicated, (wherefore the divine works of Virgil and the other stated poets had not only sunk into neglect, but well nigh into contempt at the hands of the many) having himself begun, according as the loftiness of the matter demanded, after this guise:

Ultima regna canam, fluido contermina mundo,

Spiritibus que lata patent, que premia solvunt

Pro meritis cuicumque suis, &c. ¹

he abandoned it; for he conceived it was a vain thing to put crusts of bread into the mouths of such as were still sucking milk; wherefore he began his work again in style suited to modern tastes, and followed it up in the vernacular.

This book of the Comedy, according as some maintain, he dedicated to three most distinguished Italians, after its threefold division; one to each after this fashion: the first part, to wit the Hell, he dedicated to Ugucione della Faggiuola, who was then in Tuscany, Lord of Pisa, in marvellous glory; the second part, to wit the Purgatory, he dedicated to the Marquis Moruello Malespina, the third part, to wit the Paradise, to Frederick, third king of Sicily. Some will have it that he dedicated the whole to Messer Cane della Scala;

¹ The furthest realms I sing, conterminous with the flowing universe, stretching afar for spirits, paying the rewards to each after his merits, etc.

but as to which of these two is the truth we have nothing else to go on save only as sundry, each after his fancy, discourse ; nor is it matter of so great weight as to call for serious investigation.

IN like manner this excellent author, on the coming of the Emperor Henry VII., made a book in Latin prose, called *Monarchia*, which is divided into three books after the three points which he therein determines. In the first, he proves, by logical disputation, that for the well-being of the world the Empire is a necessity; and this is the first point. In the second he shows, by historical arguments, that Rome attained to the imperial title by right; which is the second point. In the third, he proves, by theological arguments, that the authority of the Empire proceeds direct from God, and not through the mediation of any vicar of his, as it seems the clergy would have it; and this is the third point. This book was condemned several years after the author's death by Messer Beltrando, Cardinal of Poggetto, and papal legate in the parts of Lombardy; Pope John XXII. being in the Chair. And the reason was because Lewis, Duke of Bavaria, chosen King of the Romans by the electors of Germany, came to Rome for his coronation, against the pleasure of the said Pope John, and, being in Rome, he made a minor friar, called brother Piero della Corvara, Pope, in violation

of the ordinances of the Church, and he made many cardinals and bishops ; and there he caused himself to be crowned by this Pope. And a question as to his authority rising up in many cases, he and his followers, having come upon this book, began to make use of many of the arguments it contained, in support of his authority and of themselves ; whereupon the book, hitherto scarcely known, became very famous. But afterwards, when the said Lewis was gone back to Germany, and his followers, especially the clergy, had come to their fall and were dispersed, the said Cardinal, with none to gainsay him, seized the aforesaid book, and condemned it publicly to the flames, as containing heresies. And in like manner he was bent on dealing with the bones of the author, to the eternal infamy and confusion of his memory, had it not been opposed by a valiant and noble cavalier of Florence, by name Pino della Tosa, who was then at Bologna, where this thing was being discussed ; and with him in this was Messer Ostagio da Polenta ; both of whom had much power with the aforesaid Cardinal.

Besides these the said Dante composed two *Eclogues*, of great beauty, which were dedicated and despatched by him (in answer to certain verses sent to him) to Master Giovanni del Virgilio, of whom mention hath

been made above on other occasions. He also composed a Comment, in prose, in the Florentine vernacular, on three Odes (of the greater kind) of his own, and seems to have purposed, when he began, to comment upon them all; but thereafter, whether it were through changed intent or lack of time, we find no more than these annotated by him; and this, which he called *Convivio*, is a full beauteous work and worthy of praise.

Afterwards, already nigh his death, he composed a little book in Latin prose, which he entitled *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, wherein he purposed to give instruction to whoso would have it, concerning composition in rhyme; and although it appears from the said book that he had it in mind to write four books on this, yet whether it be that he was overtaken by death ere he had accomplished more, or that the rest have been lost, there are no more but only two to be found. This great poet also wrote many prose *Epistles* in Latin, good store of which are still to be found. He composed many *Odes* of the greater kind, and store of *Sonnets* and *Ballads*, both of love and morals, besides such as appear in his *Vita Nuova*; of all which things I am not careful to make special mention at present.

On such things as these above shewn forth this

illustrious man bestowed such part of his time as he might steal from his amorous sighs, from his piteous tears, from his private and public cares, and the many tossings of hostile fortune ; works far more acceptable to God and man than the guiles, the frauds, the lies, the rapines and the treacheries, which the most part of men now ply, all seeking one same goal by diverse paths, to wit, that they may grow rich, as though all good, all honour, all blessing lay therein. Oh foolish minds ! One brief portion of an hour, when the spirit parts from the failing body, shall bring all these blame-worthy toils to naught ; and time that devoureth all things shall straight annul the rich man's memory, or preserve it for a certain space, to his great shame ; whereas for our poet this assuredly shall not be, but rather as we see that weapons of war become ever brighter the more they be used, so shall it be with his name ; for the more it shall be rubbed by time the more shining shall it grow. Wherefore let whoso will toil in his own vanities ; and let it suffice him to be let alone, without his seeking to go about to reprehend the virtuous doings of another, with blame that he himself understandeth not.

I HAVE briefly set forth what was the origin, what the studies, what the life and habits, and what the works of that glorious man and most illustrious poet Dante Alighieri, together with sundry other matters by way of digression, as has been granted me by him who is the giver of all grace. Well do I know that all this might have been far better and more discreetly set forth by many another ; but if any doth what he knoweth to do, more is not required of him. My having written according to my knowledge hindereth not another who should suppose himself able to write better than I have done from so doing ; nay perchance if in any matter I have erred I shall give occasion to some other to write ; that he may tell the truth, concerning our Dante, in some matter wherein I find none hitherto to have done it. But my toil is not yet completed. One passage (according to a promise made in progress of this work) remains for me to expound ; to wit, the dream of the Poet's mother, seen by her when she was great with him ; of which I purpose to deliver myself as briefly as my knowledge and power will compass, and then to make an end of the discourse.

The gentle lady in her pregnancy seemed to herself to give birth to a child at the foot of a very lofty laurel at the side of a clear fountain ; and, as I related above, the child feeding on the berries that fell from this tree and the waters of the fountain seemed in short space to grow into a great shepherd, filled with much longing for the leaves of that tree under which he was ; the which whilst he was striving to obtain, her thought he fell, and straightway she seemed to be looking not upon him, but upon a most beautiful peacock ; moved by which marvel the gentle lady without seeing aught more of him broke her sweet sleep.

The Divine Excellence, which from eternity foreseeth every future thing as though present, is wont, at the instigation of its own goodness, whensoever nature, its general minister, is about to produce some unwonted effect amongst mortals, to give us warning thereof by some manifestation, whether by sign or dream or some other fashion ; in order that from this setting forth in advance we may infer that all knowledge abideth in the Lord of nature, producer of all things. And such a setting forth beforehand, if we closely consider it, was made at the coming into the world of that poet of whom we have made such large discourse above. And to what person could he have made it who would have

seen and preserved it with so much affection as she who was destined to be, or rather already was, the mother of the thing set forth? Surely to none. Therefore it was to her that he revealed it. And what it was that he revealed to her has already been set forth in what is written above; but we are now to look with keener vision into what he meant. The lady, then, thought she gave birth to a child; and truly so she did within short space from seeing the vision. But what the lofty laurel under which she gave birth to him was intended to signify we have still to consider.

It is the opinion of astrologers and of many natural philosophers that bodies here below are produced and nourished by the virtue and the influence of the bodies there above; and guided by them also, unless the reason in its utmost strength, enlightened by divine grace, resist them. Wherefore, taking note what heavenly body is in greatest power on the degree [of the Zodiac] which is mounting across the horizon at the time when anyone is born, they declare that the disposition of the native will entirely accord with that most potent body, or rather with its attributes. Wherefore the laurel under which the lady thought she gave our Dante to the world signifieth methinks that the disposition of the heaven at his birth showed itself such as to indicate

magnanimity and poetic eloquence ; which two things are shown forth by the laurel, the tree of Phæbus, wherewith poets are wont to be crowned, as hath been shown at large above. The berries whence the child, when born, was nourished I understand to be the effects produced aforetime by such like disposition of the heavens ; to wit books of poetry and what poets teach, by which books and teaching our Dante was in the deepest sense nourished, that is instructed. The clear spring of which she thought he drank I take to indicate nought else than the exuberance of philosophic teaching, moral and natural ; for even as it cometh from hidden exuberance in the womb of earth, so these instructions derive their being and cause from the copious flow of demonstrative reasonings (which may be likened in speech to the exuberance of earth) ; for like as food cannot be rightly disposed, in the entrails of him who taketh it, without drink, so neither can any science be rightly fitted into the intellect of any unless it be arranged and disposed by philosophic demonstrations. And so we may very well say that with the clear waters, to wit philosophy, Dante disposed in his entrails, to wit in his intellect, the berries whereon he fed, to wit the poetry which, as said above, he studied with all his care.

His growing straightway into a shepherd signifies the excellence of his wit, wherein he straightway became such and so great that in short time he compassed by study all that was needful for becoming a shepherd, that is a giver of food to such other intellects as were in need thereof. And, as every man may easily understand, there are two manners of shepherds; the one shepherds as to the body, the other shepherds as to the spirit. Shepherds as to the body are of two manners, the first are those which are commonly called shepherds by mankind, to wit such as look to sheep, or oxen or any other animal; the second are fathers of families, by whose care must needs be fed and guarded and governed the flocks of children and servants and others who are subject to them. Shepherds of the spirit may in like manner be spoken of as of two sorts, one of which is of those who feed the souls of the living with the word of God (and these are prelates, preachers, priests, to whose charge are committed the frail souls of such as abide under the guidance assigned to each); the other is of such as, lecturing on what they of old have written, or writing fresh what they deem hath not been clearly expounded or hath been omitted, inform the minds and intellects of their hearers and readers with most excellent instruction : and these last

are generally called Doctors, in whatsoever faculty it may be. Of this manner of shepherds our poet straightway, to wit in short season, became one. And to perceive that this is truth we have only to look at his Comedy (letting be the other works composed by him) which with the charm and beauty of its text feeds not only men but children and women, and with the wondrous sweetness of profoundest meanings hidden beneath the same it doth (after holding them some time in suspense) refresh and feed established intellects. His striving to possess some of those leaves, the fruit whereof had nourished him, shows forth naught else than the burning longing which he had (as said above) for the laurel crown; which is desired for naught else save to bear testimony to the fruit. And whilst he was most ardently longing for these leaves it says that she saw him fall, which fall was no other than that whereby we all fall to rise no more, to wit death; which (if what was said above be borne in mind) came to pass at the moment of his utmost longing for the laurel crown.

Then it goes on to say that from a shepherd she straightway saw him change into a peacock, by which transformation his after fame may right well be understood, which how far so ever it may rest on his other

works yet chiefly liveth in his Comedy, which in my judgment excellently conforms to the peacock, if the characteristics of one and of the other be examined. The peacock, as would seem, amongst his other attributes hath four notable ones ; the first is that he hath angelic feathers, wherein he hath an hundred eyes, the second is that he hath foul feet and noiseless tread ; the third is that he hath a voice right dreadful to hear ; the fourth and last is that his flesh is odoriferous and corrupteth not. Now these four things are fully compassed by our poet's Comedy ; but in as much as the order in which they are set down above can not be conveniently adhered to, I will proceed to fit them in as one or the other shall be most to the purpose, and I will begin with the last.

I say that the meaning of our Comedy is like the flesh of the peacock, because whether thou call it moral or theological, and in whatever part of the book thou take most delight, it is absolute and immutable truth which not only cannot receive corruption, but the more it be ransacked the more doth it reek of its incorruptible sweetness to such as consider it. And of this it were easy to show many examples if the present theme allowed it, wherefore without producing any I leave it to the search of such as understand. I said

that angelic feathers covered his flesh ; and I say angelic not that I know whether angels have them such or otherwise, but speculating as mortals best can, and hearing that angels fly, I opine that they must needs have feathers ; and not knowing of any such amongst these birds of ours more beauteous nor more winsome, nay, nor as much so, as those of the peacock, I imagine that they must needs have them so fashioned ; and so I call not those of heaven after these of earth, but these after those, because the angel is a nobler fowl than the peacock. And by these feathers, whereby the body is covered, I understand the beauty of the wondrous story which sounds upon the surface of the letter of the Comedy ; as that he descended into Hell, and examined the disposition of the place, and the varied states of them that dwell therein ; that he climbed up the Mount of Purgatory, and heard the tears and lamentations of such as hope to become holy ; and thence ascended into Paradise and saw the ineffable glory of the blessed ; a story as beauteous and fascinating as was ever conceived, not to say heard, by any ; divided into an hundred cantos, even as certain have it that the peacock hath on his tail an hundred eyes, which Cantos distinguish the variance pertaining to the matter dealt with as carefully as the eyes distinguish the colours or the differences of the

things presented to them. Wherefore the flesh of our peacock is in truth covered with angelic feathers.

In like manner the feet of the peacock are foul and its gait silent, which things excellently conform to our author's Comedy; for since the whole body seems to be supported on the feet, so it obviously appears that every work composed in writing rests on the fashion of its speech, and the vernacular speech, wherein and whereon the whole structure of the Comedy is supported, is by comparison with the lofty and commanding literary style adopted by all other poets, foul, though it be fairer than the other vernaculars be, and is suited to the understandings of to-day. The silent gait signifies the lowness of the style, which of necessity is required in Comedies, as they know who understand what Comedy means.

Finally, I say that the voice of the peacock is dreadful, which (albeit the sweetness of our poet's words be great as concerns their first impression) is without doubt excellently appropriate to him if we look deep into the marrow within. Who hath a more dreadful cry than he when with fierce resourcefulness of invention he fixes his fangs in the vices of many yet alive, and lashes the vices of them that have passed away? What voice is more terrible than that of the chastiser to him who is prone

to sin? Verily none. With his demonstrations he at once terrifies the good and dismays the bad ; wherefore, in whatsoever degree he succeeds, herein in such degree may he be said to have a voice truly terrible. For which thing, and for the others indicated above, it clearly appears that he who was a shepherd when alive hath become a peacock after his death, as we may believe was revealed by divine inspiration in sleep to his dear mother.

This explanation of the dream of our poet's mother I know I have only worked out quite on the surface ; and this for sundry reasons. Firstly, because perchance the talent needed for so great an undertaking was not at hand ; next, even if it had been, my main purpose allowed it not ; finally, if the talent had been there and the matter had allowed it, it were well done by me to have said no more than I have in order to leave some space for discourse to such other as might have more capacity and more desire thereto than have I. And therefore what hath been said by me should fitly suffice so far as I am concerned ; and let what is missing be left to the care of him who followeth.

My little bark hath reached the port to which she turned her prow when loosing from the opposing shore ; and though the voyage have been but short, and the sea which she hath furrowed low and calm, none the

less am I to render thanks that she hath made her voyage without impediment, to him who hath lent her sails a prosperous breeze ; to whom, with that humility, with that devotion, with that affection which most I may, not such thanks, nor so great as were befitting, but such as I can, do I render ; blessing his name and his worth for ever.

LIFE OF DANTE
BY LIONARDO BRUNI

HAVING within the last few days completed a work of great length I fell into the desire of reading something in the vernacular to refresh my toil-spent mind ; because, as at table one unchanging diet, so in study, one unchanging kind of reading palls upon us. As I looked round then, with this purpose, my hand fell upon a little work of Boccaccio, entitled ‘Of the life, manners and studies of the most illustrious poet Dante’ ; and though I had previously read this work with great diligence, yet as I now scanned it anew it came upon me that this most delightful and charming Boccaccio of ours wrote the life and manners of so sublime a poet just as though he were writing the *Filocolo*, or the *Filostrato*, or the *Fiametta*. For it is all full of love and sighs and burning tears ; as though man were born into this world only that he might take his place in those ten amorous *Days* wherein enamoured ladies and gallant youths recounted the hundred Tales. And he grows so warm in these passages of love that he drops the weighty and substantial parts of Dante’s life, passing them over in silence, while he records trivial matters and holds his peace concerning grave

ones. So it came into my heart to write another life of Dante for my diversion, taking more note of the memorable things. Nor do I this in disparagement of Boccaccio, but that my work may be a supplement to his. And then I will add the life of Petrarch, for I regard the knowledge and fame of these two poets as being of great concern to the glory of our city. Let us then approach in the first instance, the affairs of Dante.

Dante's forebears were of very ancient stock in Florence, in so much that he seems in certain passages to imply that his ancestors were of those Romans who founded Florence; but this is a matter of much uncertainty, and in my opinion no more than mere conjecture. Of those of whom I find notice his great great-grandfather was Messer Cacciaguida, a Florentine cavalier who served under the Emperor Conrad. This Messer Cacciaguida had two brothers, the one named Moronto, and the other Eliseo. We read of no descendants of Moronto; but from Eliseo sprang the family called the Elisei, and perhaps this had been the family name even before. From Messer Cacciaguida were sprung the Aldighieri, so called after a son of his, who took the name of Aldighieri from his mother's family. Messer Cacciaguida and his brothers and their forebears, lived just in the district of Porta San Piero,

where you first enter from the Mercato Vecchio, in the houses still called of the Elisei, for the family possession remained with them. The descendants of Messer Cacciaguida called the Aldighieri dwelt in the piazza beyond San Martino del Vescovo, their mansion backing against the street that runs to the house of the Sacchetti and in the other direction leads to the houses of the Donati and the Giuochi.

Dante was born in the years of the Lord 1265, a little after the return to Florence of the Guelfs, who had been in exile by reason of the defeat of Montaperti. In his boyhood he had liberal nurture and was put under teachers of letters, and at once gave evidence of the greatest genius, calculated to achieve the highest result. His father, Aldighieri, he lost in his boyhood; but none the less, under the encouragement of his relatives and of Brunetto Latini, a man of the highest worth as things then went, he gave himself not only to literature but to other liberal studies; omitting nothing that pertains to man's excellence. But for all this he did not shut himself up at ease, nor sever himself from the world, but living and moving about amongst other young men of his age, he approved himself gracious and skilful and valiant in every youthful exercise; in so much that in that memorable and most mighty

battle that was fought at Campaldino, he, being of military age and well seen to, found himself under arms, fighting strenuously, mounted amongst the fore-fighters. And here he was in the utmost peril; for the first engagement was between the squadrons of cavalry, that is cavaliers, of whom they on the side of the Aretines conquered and overcame the squadron of the Florentine cavaliers with such fury, that, scattered and routed, they must needs flee to the foot. This rout it was that lost the battle to the Aretines; for their victorious cavalry, pursuing the fugitives to a great distance, left their foot behind them, so that thenceforth they could not fight in full force anywhere, but only the horse alone by themselves without succour from the foot at first, and afterward the foot alone without succour from the horse. But on the Florentine side the contrary took place, for since their horse had fled to join their foot, they all made one body and easily overcame first the horse and then the foot of the enemy. This battle Dante describes in a letter of his, and says that he was in the fight, and draws a plan of the battle. And to understand the matter we must know that the Uberti, Lamberti, Abati and all the other Florentine refugees were with the Aretines, and all the refugees of Arezzo, Guelf nobles and commoners,

who were all exiles at that time, were with the Florentines in this battle. And that is why the words inscribed in the Palace run: 'On the defeat of the Ghibellines at Certomondo,' and not 'On the defeat of the Aretines,' so as not to hurt those Aretines who shared the victory with with the Commonwealth. Returning then to our subject matter I say that Dante was found fighting valiantly for his country in this battle; and I could wish that our Boccaccio had made mention of this valour rather than of his falling in love at nine years old and such like trifles, which he tells of so great a man. But what can you expect? 'The tongue goes where the tooth aches;' and 'His discourse who loves drinking is ever of wines.'

When Dante returned from this battle he gave himself up to his studies more fervently than ever, but nevertheless maintained all his social and civic intercourse. And it was wonderful how, though he studied without cessation, no one would have supposed from his gay style and youthful company that he was studying at all. And here let me say a word in reproof of the many ignorant folk who suppose that no one is a student except such as hide themselves away in solitude and leisure; whereas I, for my part, never came across one of these muffled recluses from human conversation

who knew three letters. A great and lofty genius has no need of such inflictions; nay, 'tis a most true and sure conclusion that such as do not learn quickly never learn at all, so that this estranging and removing themselves from company is peculiar to those whose low intellect makes them incapable of ever learning anything.

Nor was it only into social converse with men that Dante entered; for he also took a wife in his youth, and she was a lady of the family of the Donati, called by name Mistress Gemma, by whom he had several children, as we shall shew in another part of this work. And here Boccaccio loses all patience, and says that wives are impediments to studies, forgetting that Socrates, the noblest philosopher that ever was, had a wife and children and held office in the Commonwealth of his city. And Aristotle, beyond whom wisdom and learning cannot go, had two wives in succession, and had children and great wealth. And Marcus Tullius, and Cato, and Varro, and Seneca, supreme amongst the Latins, philosophers every man of them, had wives, and took office and governments in the Commonwealth. And so, by Boccaccio's leave, his judgments on this point are very weak, and far removed from the true opinion. Man is a social animal, as

all philosophers agree ; and the first union, by increase from which the city springs, is that of husband and wife ; nor can anything be perfect where this is not ; and this love is the only natural, legitimate, and permissible one. Dante then having taken a wife, and living, after the ordinances of the state, a decent and studious life, was much employed in the Commonwealth ; and finally, when he had reached the due age, he was made one of the Priors, not by lot as is the present use, but by election as was the custom in those times. Associated with him in the Priorate were Messer Palmieri degli Altoviti and Neri di Messer Jacopo degli Alberti, and other colleagues. And this Priorate was in 1300. From this Priorate sprung his exile, and all the adverse fortunes of his life, as he himself writes in a letter, the words of which are these : ‘ All my woes and all my misfortunes had their cause and origin in my ill-omened election to the Priorate. Of which Priorate, though I was not worthy by prudence, yet by good faith and by age I was not unworthy of it ; for ten years had already passed since the battle of Campaldino, wherein the Ghibelline faction was all but utterly slain and undone, and wherein I found myself, not raw in arms ; and wherein I had much dread and at the end the greatest gladness,

by reason of the varying chances of that battle.' Such are his words.

I now intend to relate the cause of his banishment in detail, for it is well worthy of note, and Boccaccio passes over it so dry-shod that I suspect it was not so well known to him as it is to me, because of the history which I have written. The city of Florence having in times past been the scene of great conflicts between the Guelfs and Ghibellines, had finally remained in the hands of the Guelfs; and when this had lasted a long space of time there arose again another plague of factions amongst the Guelfs themselves who had control of the Commonwealth. And the factions were called Bianchi and Neri. This perverse dispute first arose in Pistoia, especially in the family of the Cancellieri; and all Pistoia being now divided into factions, the Florentines ordained, by way of remedy, that the heads of these parties should come to Florence that they should have no further power of making trouble at home. This remedy turned out to do less good to the Pistoians by removing their party leaders, than harm to the Florentines by drawing the infection upon them. For the leaders had many connections and friendships in Florence, and at once kindled a greater conflagration there, because of the zeal of their relatives and friends

on either side, than they had left behind them at Pistoia. And as this matter came to be debated in public and private the ill seed spread apace, and the whole city was so divided that there was hardly a family, noble or plebeian, which was not divided against itself, nor was there a private person of any account who was not of one party or the other. And the division reached to very brothers, one holding with the one side, and another with the other. And as the contest went on month after month, and disputes were multiplied not only in words but in arrogant and embittered deeds begun by the youthful and extending to the mature, at last all the city was thrown into upheaval and uncertainty. Then it chanced that, while Dante was one of the Priors, the faction of the Neri had a meeting in the church of Santa Trinità. The proceedings were a profound secret, but the effect was to approach Pope Boniface VIII., who was then in the Chair, to get him to send Charles of Valois, of the royal house of France, to Florence, as pacificator and reorganiser of the city. And when this meeting was heard of by the opposite faction of the Bianchi, they at once conceived the utmost suspicion of it; so much so that they took up arms and surrounded themselves with their allies and went to the Priors, making it a grievance that a meeting

had been held to discuss the affairs of the city at a private council, and declaring that all was done in order to banish them from Florence. And finally they required the Priors to see that such excess of presumption was punished. Then they who had called the meeting, being alarmed in their turn, took arms, and complained before the Priors that their adversaries had armed and strengthened themselves without any public deliberation, and intended under various colourable pretexts to banish them; whereon they required the Priors to have them punished as disturbers of the public peace. Both parties had gathered their men-at-arms and allies. Suspicion and fear and danger were at their height. So when the city was all in arms and commotion, the Priors, at Dante's suggestion, determined to call out the civic guard; and when so strengthened they relegated the leaders of both parties to confinement under bounds; namely these, Messer Corso Donati, Messer Geri Spini, Messer Giachinotto de' Pazzi, Messer Rosso della Tosa, and others with them. All these were of the Black faction, and were put under bounds at the Castello della Pieve in the district of Perugia. Of the White faction the following were put under bounds at Serezana, Messer Gentile and Messer Torrigiano de' Cerchi, Guido

Cavalcanti, Baschiera della Tosa, Baldinaccio Adimari, Naldo di Messer Lottino Gherardini, and others. This brought much blame upon Dante, and though he stands on his defence and declares himself to be above party, he was none the less reputed to lean to the White faction, and to disapprove of the council held in Santa Trinità to summon Charles of Valois to Florence, as likely to cause divisions and woes to the city; and the odium was increased by the fact that the group of citizens confined at Serezana was soon readmitted into Florence, and the other that was confined at Castello della Pieve was kept outside. To this Dante replies that when they were recalled from Serezana, he was no longer in office as Prior, and should not be held responsible; and he further declares that their recall was due to the illness and death of Guido Cavalcanti, who fell sick at Serezana because of the bad climate, and soon after died. This unequal treatment moved the Pope to send Charles to Florence, and on being received in the city with honour, out of respect to the Pope and the house of France, he at once recalled the banished citizens, and subsequently drove out the White party. He took occasion to this from the discovery of certain practices, revealed by Messer Piero Ferranti, a baron of his, who said that he had been requested by

three gentlemen of the White Faction, to wit, Naldo de Messer Lottino Gherardini, Baschiera della Tosa, and Baldinaccio Adimari, so to work upon Messer Charles of Valois as to make him secure the supremacy in the city to their party; and that they had promised to make him Governor of Prato if he should accomplish this. And he produced this request and promise in writing with their seals to it, and I have seen the original document which is still in the Palace, with other public documents; but for myself I strongly suspect it; nay, I believe for certain that it is a forgery. But be this as it may, the banishment of the whole White Party followed upon it, Charles professing great indignation at this request and promise which they had made. Dante was not in Florence at the time, but was at Rome, whither he had been sent shortly before as ambassador to the Pope, to offer concord and peace on the part of the citizens; but none the less by reason of the rage of those of the Black Party, who had been exiled in his Priorate, a rush was made upon his house, which was plundered of everything he had, and all his possessions were devastated; and he and Messer Palmieri Altoviti were banished in their persons for contumacy in not answering the summons, but not really for any fault they had committed.

The way this banishment was effected was by making an iniquitous and perverse law, with retrospective action, that the Podestà of Florence should have the power and duty of taking cognizance of all the offences that had been committed in the office of the Priorate, even though the audit had already been passed. Under this law Dante was summoned by Messer Conte de' Gabrielli, Podestà of Florence at the time, and being absent, and therefore not appearing, was condemned and banished and his goods confiscated, though for that matter, they had already been plundered and laid waste.

We have told how Dante's banishment came to pass and the occasion and method of it. Now we will tell what life he led in his exile. When Dante heard of his ruin he immediately left Rome, where he was ambassador; and journeying with all speed came to Siena. Hearing there more particulars of his disaster, and seeing no remedy, he determined to ally himself with the other refugees; and his first approach to them was in a meeting of refugees which was held at Gargonsa, where they considered many schemes and finally fixed their head quarters at Arezzo, where they made a great camp and appointed Count Alessandro da Romena their captain, with twelve councillors, amongst

whom was Dante. Drawn on from hope to hope till the year 1304, they then gathered together all the strength of their allies and set out to force an entry into Florence, with a very numerous company that had joined them not only from Arezzo but also from Bologna and from Pistoia; and, coming unawares, they instantly seized a gate of Florence and won a part of the city; but finally they were forced to retire without any result. This great hope having failed, Dante thought fit to waste no more time but departed from Arezzo and took his way to Verona. Here he was very courteously received by the Lords della Scala and remained with them some time utterly humbled, seeking by good offices and good demeanour to gain the grace of permission to return to Florence by the spontaneous recall of the government of the place. And to this intent he laboured much, and wrote repeatedly not only to individual citizens in the government, but to the people also. And amongst the rest was a long letter that begins: '*Popule mi quid feci tibi?*' Now while he was thus hoping for a return by way of pardon, the election of Henry of Luxemburg as Emperor took place; and first his election, and then his expedition threw all Italy into a fever of expectation. Whereon Dante was unable to hold his purpose

of awaiting grace, but exalting himself with disdainful mind, began to revile them who were in possession of the city, calling them infamous and evil, and threatening them with the punishment they deserved at the hands of the Emperor, from which, he said, it was evident that they could have no escape. Yet he retained so much reverence for his fatherland that when the Emperor advanced on Florence and encamped hard by the gate, he refused to accompany him, as he writes, although he had himself instigated him to the advance. Then, on the Emperor Henry's death, which took place the following summer at Buonconvento, Dante utterly lost all hope, for he had cut himself off from the way of pardon by his violent speech and writings against the citizens who were directing the Commonwealth, and there was no longer any prospect of a return by force. So relinquishing all hope he passed the rest of his life, in great poverty, in various places up and down Lombardy, Tuscany and Romagna, under the protection of various Seigneurs, till at last he withdrew to Ravenna, where he ended his life.

Having now spoken of his public misfortunes and given an account of his life under that head, we will go on to his domestic affairs, and his manners and tastes. Before his expulsion from Florence, Dante, though not

of extraordinary wealth, was not poor either ; but had a moderate patrimony, sufficient to live on handsomely. He had a brother, Francisco Alighieri ; he had a wife, as already said, and several children, whose posterity and family still survive, as will be shewn hereafter. He had a very good house in Florence, next to that of Geri di Messer Bello, his associate ; possessions in Camerata, in the Piacentina and in Piano di Ripoli ; and abundant and choice furniture, as he says. He was a man of remarkably polished manners, of reasonable height, and of pleasant aspect, full of gravity ; a slow and infrequent talker, but very keen in retort. His likeness may be seen in the church of Santa Croce, about the middle of the church, on the left hand as you go up to the great altar, excellently painted, life size, by a finished artist of the time. He delighted in music and melodies, and himself drew excellently. He wrote a finished hand, with thin long letters perfectly formed, as I have seen in certain epistles written with his own hand. He consorted in his youth with amorous swains, and was himself too engaged in the passion, not by way of wantonness but in gentleness of heart ; and in his unripe years he began to compose verses of love as may be seen in a little work of his in the vernacular, called the *Vita Nuova*. His chief pursuit was poetry,

not of the barren, poor and fantastic sort, but impregnated and enriched and confirmed by true knowledge and many disciplines. And, to make it clearer to the reader I say that a man may become a poet in two ways. One way is when his own genius is stirred and moved by a certain inward and hidden force, and this is called frenzy or mental possession. I will give an illustration of what I mean. The Blessed Francesco, by no knowledge or discipline of the schools, but by mental possession and rapture, applied his mind so closely to God that he was so to speak transfigured beyond the measure of human sense, and came to know more of God than the theologians ever learn with all their study and letters. And so in poetry a man may become a poet by inner stirrings and application of mind, and this is the highest and most perfect kind of poetry; whence some say that the poets are divine, and some call them sacred, and some call them bards, on account of the rapture and frenzy of which I speak. We have examples in Orpheus and Hesiod, both of whom were such as I have described above. Orpheus had such power that he could move rocks and woods with his lyre. And Hesiod, a rough and unlearned shepherd, having only drunk of the water of the Castalian spring, without any study became a supreme poet;

and we still have his works, which are such that none of the lettered and learned poets can surpass them. One kind of poets then comes from internal rapture of mind. The other kind comes by knowledge and study, discipline and art and forethought ; and of this second kind is Dante. For by study of philosophy, theology, astrology, arithmetic, and geometry, by reading histories, by turning over many and varied books, by vigil and sweat in his studies, he acquired the knowledge which he was to adorn and expound in his verses.

And since we have been speaking of the quality of the poets, we will now say something as to the name, which will help us to understand the thing ; and though such matters are not easy to treat of in the vernacular idiom, yet I will do my best to make them understood, because I fancy these modern poets of ours have not rightly comprehended them ; and indeed how should they, since they are ignorant of the Greek tongue ? I say then that this noun 'Poet' is a Greek noun, and means 'Maker.' But saying only so much I know that I shall not be understood ; so that I must open out the meaning further. I mean, then, [maker] of poetic books and works. There are some who read the works of others and make none themselves, as indeed is the case of most. Others are the makers of

the works themselves, even as Virgil made the book of the *Æneid*, Statius made the book of the *Thebaid*, and Ovid made the book *Metamorphoseos*, and Homer made the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. Those then who made the works, were poets, that is makers of the said works which we others read; so that we are the readers, and they were the makers. And when we hear it said, in praise of a man, that he is great at study and at letters, we often ask 'Is he doing anything himself? Will he leave any work of his own composition and making?' A poet then is one who makes any work. But here someone may say that according to me the merchant who writes up his accounts into a book would be a poet; and Titus Livius and Sallust would be poets, because each of them wrote books, and made works to be read. To this I answer that it is only in verse that men are said to 'make' poetic works. And this is because of excellence of style, for it is only in writing verses that syllables and measure and sound are observed. And in our own vernacular we say 'so and so makes Odes and Sonnets,' but if he writes a letter to his friends we do not say that he has 'made' anything. The name of poet indicates excellence and beauty of style, in verse, covered and veiled with pleasing and exalted invention. And just as every presiding

authority gives orders and commands [*impera*], but he only is Emperor [*Imperadore*] who is supreme over all, so he who composes works in verse, and is supreme and super-eminent amongst composers of such like works, is called a Poet. This is the certain and absolute truth as to the name and the doings of the Poets. Writing in literary or vernacular style has nothing to do with it, and makes no more difference than writing in Greek or in Latin.

Every language hath its own perfection, its own euphony, its own polished and artistic utterance. So if anyone should ask me why Dante chose to write in the vernacular rather than in Latin and in the literary style, I would give the true answer, namely, that Dante felt himself much more fitted for this vernacular style in rhyme, than for the Latin or literary style. And certainly he has exquisitely expressed in this vernacular rhyme many things that he would not have known how to express and could not have expressed in the Latin tongue and in heroic verses. The proof lies in the *Eclogues* which he wrote in hexameters; and which, granting them to be good, I have often seen surpassed. For the truth is our poet's strength lay in vernacular rhyme, in which he excels above all others, but in Latin verses and in prose he hardly reached

mediocrity. The reason of this is that his age was given up to rhymed poetry; but of elegance of diction in prose, or in Latin verse, they knew nothing at that period, but were rude and gross, and without literary skill, though learned enough in these disciplines after the friar and scholastic type.

Dante tells us that rhyme began to be written about a hundred and fifty years before his time; and the first to practise it were Guido Guinizzelli of Bologna, and Guittone, a Jovial Friar of Arezzo, and Buongiuunta of Lucca, and Guido of Messina, all of whom Dante far excelled in science and polish and elegance and charm, so much so that good judges suppose that no one will ever surpass Dante in rhymed poetry. And indeed we can but marvel at the grandeur and sweetness of his writing, so wise and full of meaning and dignity, with such marvellous variety and wealth, such knowledge of philosophy, such familiarity with ancient history, and an acquaintance with modern affairs such that he seems to have been present himself at every event. These beauties are unfolded with such charm of verse that they take captive the mind of every reader, and far most of those who have most understanding. His invention was admirable and was hit on by a true stroke of genius; for it unites

the description of the world, the description of the heavens and the planets, the description of men, the rewards and punishments of human life, bliss, misery and all that lies between the two extremes. Nor do I suppose that any man ever handled a subject more large and fertile in giving scope for the expression of the very soul of all his thoughts, by reason of the variety of the spirits that discourse of the diverse causes of things, of diverse countries, and of the varied chances of fortune.

This his chief work Dante began before his expulsion, and afterwards finished it during his exile, as may be clearly seen from the work itself. He also wrote some moral *Odes* and *Sonnets*. His *Odes* are perfectly polished and beautiful, and full of lofty matter; and all of them open with some large conception, as the one that begins

‘Amor che muovi tua virtù dal cielo,
Come il Sol lo splendore.’

which contains a subtle and philosophical comparison between the effects of the sun and the effects of love; and another which begins

‘Tre donne intorno al cor mi son venute.’

and another

‘Donne che avete intelletto d’amore.’

And he is equally subtle and polished and full of learning in many other Odes. In his Sonnets he is not so strong.

Such are his works in the vernacular. In Latin he wrote prose and verse. In prose there is a book called *Monarchia*, written without any charm of style. He also wrote another book entitled *De Vulgari Eloquentia*. He also wrote many prose *Epistles*. In verse he wrote certain *Eclogues*; and the beginning of his book, in heroic verses; but not succeeding in this style he pursued it no further.

Dante died in 1321, at Ravenna. He had a son, amongst others, named Pietro, who studied in Law and reached distinction. By his own deserts, and aided by the memory of his father, he became a great man and made a large fortune and settled at Verona with abundant means. This Messer Piero had a son called Dante, and to this Dante was born Lionardo, who is still living and has several children. And it is not long since this Lionardo came to Florence with other young men of Verona, well appointed and in good style; and he paid me a visit as a friend of the memory of his great-grandfather, Dante. And I shewed him Dante's house, and that of his forebears, and I pointed out to him many particulars with which he

was not acquainted, because he and his family had been estranged from their fatherland. And so does Fortune roll this world around, and shift its inhabitants as she turns her wheels.

APPENDICES

I.

Extract from GIOVANNI VILLANI's *Florentine Chronicle*.

In the said year 1321, in the month of July, Dante Alighieri, of Florence, died in the city of Ravenna, in Romagna, having returned from an embassy to Venice in the service of the Lords of Polenta, with whom he was living ; and in Ravenna, in front of the door of the chief church, he was buried with great honour, in the garb of a poet and of a great philosopher. He died in exile from the Commonwealth of Florence, at the age of about fifty-six years. This Dante was an honourable and ancient citizen of Florence, of the Porta San Piero, and our neighbour ; and his exile from Florence was by reason that when Messer Charles of Valois, of the House of France, came to Florence in the year 1301, and banished the White party, as has been mentioned before at the proper time, the said Dante was among the chief governors of our city, and pertained to that party, albeit he was a Guelf ; and therefore, for no other fault, he was driven out and banished from Florence with the said White party ; and he went to the University at Bologna, and afterwards at Paris, and to many parts of the world. This man was a great scholar in almost every branch of

learning, albeit he was a layman ; he was a great poet and philosopher, and a rhetorician, as perfect in poetry and verse as in public speaking ; a most noble poet, supreme in rhyme, with the most polished and beautiful style which ever was in our language up to his time and since it. In his youth he wrote the book of the *Vita Nuova* of love ; and afterwards, when he was in exile, he wrote some twenty *Odes* of high excellence, treating of moral questions and of love ; and he wrote amongst others, three noble *Letters* ; one he addressed to the Government of Florence, complaining of his undeserved exile ; the second he addressed to the Emperor Henry when he was besieging Brescia, reproving him for his delay, almost in prophetic strain ; the third to the Italian Cardinals, at the time of the vacancy after the death of Pope Clement, praying them to unite in the election of an Italian Pope ; all these in Latin, in a lofty style, and with weighty pronouncements and authorities, much commended by men of sage judgment. And he wrote the *Comedy*, wherein, in polished verse, and with great and subtle disquisitions, moral, natural, astrological, philosophical, and theological, with new and beautiful illustrations, comparisons, and poetic inventions, he dealt and treated in a hundred chapters or cantos, of the existence and

condition of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, as loftily as it were possible to treat of them, as in his said treatise may be seen and understood by whoso has subtle intellect. It is true that in this Comedy he indulged in invective and denunciation after the manner of poets, perhaps in certain places more than was fitting; but maybe his exile was the cause of this. He wrote also the *Monarchia*, in which he treated of the office of Pope and of Emperor. [And he began a *Commentary* upon fourteen of his afore-named moral Odes in the vulgar tongue which, in consequence of his death, is only completed as to three of them; the which commentary, judging by what appears, was turning out a lofty, beautiful, subtle, and superb work, adorned by lofty style and fine philosophical and astrological reasonings. Also he wrote a little book entitled *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, of which he promises to write four books, but of these only two exist, perhaps on account of his untimely death; and here, in strong and ornate Latin, by choice considerations, he tries all the vernaculars of Italy, and finds them wanting.]¹ This Dante, because of his knowledge, was somewhat haughty and reserved and disdainful, and, after the fashion of a philosopher, careless of graces and not easy in his

¹ The passage inclosed in brackets does not appear in all the MSS.

converse with laymen ; but because of the other virtues and knowledge and worth of so great a citizen, it seems fitting to confer lasting memory upon him in this our Chronicle, although; indeed, his noble works, left to us in writing, are the true testimony to him, as also an illustrious honour to our city.

II.

Extract from FILIPPO VILLANI's *Life of Dante* in his *De Origine Civitatis Florentiæ et ejusdem Famosis Civibus*.

In those days the most noble knight Guido Novello, of the house of Polenta, was ruler of the city of Ravenna, not as a tyrant but as a citizen; and since he loved all excellence, but especially in letters, and had learned that Dante was still wandering, unsettled, in the region of Romandiola, he addressed him both by letters and emissaries and quietly invited him to share his life. To this the poet assented, and coming to the spot brought to a happy end the work that had kept him at his toilsome vigils three and twenty years and more.

Now it chanced that while he stood high in honour with Guido, the Venetians, in their overweening strength, made unjust war upon this same Guido, and mustering their forces by land and sea made arrogant haste to destroy him; and this it was that, in the order of fate, hastened for the poet such an end of life as usually befalls illustrious men.

For Guido, at this crisis of his affairs, having little confidence in his own forces, imagined that the eloquence and reputation of the poet might avert impending ruin from him. So he deputed to him the charge of seeking peace by means of an oration. And he,

gladly undertaking the duty, exposed to many snares on the journey, anxiously approached Venice. But the Venetians, who had little knowledge of eloquence, were so scared by the wonderful power of persuasion that report assigned to the poet, that for fear of being moved from their arrogant purpose they refused his repeated request for permission to expound his embassy to them. And when the poet, without having obtained an audience, and now struck with fever, besought an escort, coasting by sea to Ravenna, they flatly refused him ; for they were struck with the yet more insane idea that since they had put the whole power of peace and war into the hands of the Admiral of the fleet, if they allowed Dante a safe conduct by sea he would be able to make the Admiral turn which way he would, and would expose him to contumely. Verily it is a lasting stain of senseless folly upon so illustrious a city, and one that reveals its flippancy, in spite of all its greatness, to have been in terror of a man's ready speech moving it from what it had deliberately determined, and, still worse, to have wished to banish eloquence from its confines.

The poet, therefore, had to endure the hardships of the journey by land, and when he reached Ravenna he died within a few days, and was mourned with a public funeral.

III.

A DOCUMENT preserved in a MS. of BOCCACCIO's.

To the renowned and magnificent lord Uguccone della Faggiola, highly pre-eminent amongst Italian magnates, brother Ilario, a humble monk of Corvo, at the mouth of the Macra, wishes salvation in him who is the true salvation of us all.

As our Saviour declares in the Gospel, "A good man, out of the treasure of his heart, brings forth good"; wherein two things appear to be implied, namely that by the things which came out of them we may perceive what things are inside of other men, and that by means of words (which to that purpose were given us) we may make manifest what things are inside of ourselves. "For by their fruits" (as it is written) "ye shall know them," which although it was said of sinners, we may much more universally apply to the just, seeing that the latter have, in a way, a perpetual motive for revealing themselves, but the former for concealing. Nor is it only the desire of glory that urges this outward fructifying of the good things which we have within, for the express command of God warns us not to allow anything which has graciously been granted to us to remain idle, for God and nature despise

idleness; wherefore that tree which holds back its fruit in due season, is condemned to the flames.

Now this man whose work, together with my exposition of it, I purpose sending you, seems, of all Italians, to have unlocked these things (according to the Scripture phrase) out of the abundance of his internal treasury, even from his boyhood; for, as I have learned from others—and very wonderful it is—before he had passed from childhood he attempted to utter unheard of things, and—which is more wonderful yet—he strove to express in vernacular speech what can scarcely be set forth in Latin itself by the most eminent authors; and I do not mean in straightforward vernacular, but in that of song. And now, to let his praises sound in his own works, wherein without doubt they shine more clearly in the eyes of the wise, I will briefly come to the purpose.

Well then, when the man of whom I speak purposed to go to the regions across the mountains, and was making his way through the diocese of Luna, whether moved by the religious associations of the place or by some other cause, he betook himself to the site of the Monastery named in the superscription. And when I saw him (as yet unknown to me, and to the rest, my brothers) I asked him what he sought; and when he

answered never a word, and yet kept on gazing at the architecture of the place, I asked him again what he sought. Then he, looking round upon me and the brothers said, "Peace." At this I burned ever more and more to learn from him what condition of man he was, and I drew him aside from the rest, and on holding some discourse with him knew who he was; for though I had never once seen him before that day yet his fame had long since reached me. Now when he saw that I was giving him all my attention, and perceived my eagerness for his words, he drew a little book from his bosom in friendly guise enough, and frankly presented it to me. "Here" (he said) "is a part of my work, which I take it thou hast never seen. Such is the record I leave you, that you may retain the memory of me the more firmly." And when he had shewn me the book, I took it joyfully to my bosom, opened it, and in his presence fixed my eyes intently upon it. And when I observed that the words were vernacular, and manifested some kind of wonder, he asked me what I was boggling at. And I answered that I was astonished at the quality of the language, partly because I thought it seemed difficult, nay inconceivable, that such arduous matter could have been expressed in the vernacular, and partly because it seemed

incongruous for so much learning to be combined with a plebeian garb. To which he in answer: "Assuredly you have reason in your thoughts; and when first the seed, maybe implanted by heaven, began to sprout towards such a purpose, I chose the language rightly belonging to the same, and not only chose but (poetising in it after the accustomed fashion) I began :

Ultima regna canam, fluido contermina mundo,
Spiritus que lata patent, que premia solvunt
Pro meritis cuicumque suis.

But when I pondered on the conditions of the present age, I saw how the works of the great poets are flung aside almost as things of naught; and thus men of high birth, for whom such works were written in a better age have (shame on them !) abandoned the liberal arts to the common folk. Wherefore I put aside the lyre to which I had trusted, and tuned another, in harmony with the tastes of the moderns; for in vain is tooth-
food put to the mouths of them that suck." And after saying this he added, with much affection, that if I could have leisure for such occupations I was to go through the work with certain brief annotations, and send it on, so annotated, to you. Whereat, though I have not fully extracted all that lies concealed in his words, I have faithfully and with free heart laboured ;

and now, in accordance with the command of that profound well-wisher of yours, I send you the work itself with the notes. And if herein aught shall seem doubtful, impute it only to my incapacity, for without doubt the text itself must needs be regarded as without defect in every way.

But if Your Magnificence should at any time make enquiry about the other two parts of this work (as one who proposes to make a whole by collecting the parts), you are to demand the second part, which follows upon this, of the renowned lord Marquis Moroello. And the third will be able to be found with the most illustrious Frederic, King of Sicily. For, as he who is its author assured me he had purposed and designed, after considering the whole of Italy, he singled out you three, out of all the rest, to receive the offering of this three-fold work. . . .

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